

Body Positivity as Public Pedagogy?
The Case of the #effyourbeautystandards Movement on Instagram

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative single-case study of the #effyourbeautystandards Instagram account and hashtag as a site of public pedagogy. Using feminist critical discourse analysis, this study sought to understand the ways it did and did not challenge hegemonic beauty standards for fat women. The study was guided by two questions: 1) How does the #effyourbeautystandards Instagram account challenge and/or reproduce hegemonic beauty norms? 2) In what ways does the body positivity promoted by #effyourbeautystandards serve (or not serve) fat women? Data consisted of the top nine Instagram posts using the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag account collected daily for one week in December 2019. Analysis of visual and textual data contained in the posts revealed that much can be learned from whose bodies were seen and not seen. Non-fat and smaller fat women who were young, conventionally attractive, and performed traditional femininity dominated. While there was racial/ethnic diversity, none of the fat women featured showed any physical or other (dis)abilities nor were any of the women clearly members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The women only occasionally made benign statements about body positivity, with most narratives and hashtags instead focused on advertising clothing brands, pointing to the role of influencer culture and capitalism on Instagram. The findings illuminated, then, that only certain bodies matter in the #effyourbeautystandards community on Instagram, namely those that most conform to hegemonic beauty standards, and that fat activism has been watered down by a body positivity movement coopted by capitalism. This study thus points to the limits of Instagram as a site for fat public pedagogy and the continued need for fat activism that ensures inclusion and positive representation of truly diverse fat bodies.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to situate myself as a settler in the colonial project known as Canada. I live and work on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe and Métis people, in Robinson-Huron treaty territory.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I decided to do a thesis, I wanted to focus on fat studies and fat pedagogy because the way that fat women are perceived and treated is highly oppressive, in Western contexts and beyond; indeed, fat oppression is a widespread social justice issue that education has the potential to combat. I am not willing to accept that my fat body is inherently diseased and undeserving of respect. I want to contribute to a body of academic work that challenges the deeply held political ideologies that underpin the idea that my fatness is a defect that hinders my ability to meaningfully participate in society.

The initial process for this thesis involved turning over the proverbial rock that is the internet to expose the prevalence of fat hatred. Combing through even a small portion of the immense amount of online information uncovered the depths of fat stigma. In a forum that allows individuals to speak openly and without consequence, I learned even more about how “shameful” it is to be fat. Thankfully, I also found a lot of fat women who have been working hard, often without pay, to push back against fat oppression and to open up space for reclamation of fat identity. I also found support and encouragement by engaging with the radical work that has been done by fat studies scholars, including the emerging work in the field called fat pedagogy.

Understandings of fatness have changed over time. The 1990’s saw a shift in public perceptions and was when notions of fat people as inherently diseased were crystalized. John Evans, Emma Rich, Brian Davies, and Rachel Allwood (2008) explain that through media coverage of countless health “experts” representing campaigns of public health, government, and agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), widespread moral panic was provoked. In this new development in fat hatred as a social phenomenon, fat was to be feared and fat people

were positioned as a threat. The “obesity” crisis was justified through a pseudoscientific apparatus informed by the neoliberal emphasis on the “responsible” individual who must engage in self-governance (Rail et al., 2010). That is, individuals’ “obesity” is the result of poor choices and moral weakness, which must be remedied if they are to be worthy of respect and considered good citizens.

Before I get much further, I need to say something about language given readers may have noticed I put “obesity” in quotation marks and I instead prefer to use the word “fat” as a descriptor of body size and shape. Marilyn Wann (2009) provides an introductory chapter in the best-known book in the field, *The Fat Studies Reader* edited by Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, in which she advocates paying careful attention to the ways in which body size is discussed. Wann argues that terms like “obese” and “overweight” are discriminatory and “inherently anti-fat,” positioning some individuals as “normal” and others as “abnormal” (p. xii). Central to the social construction of “obesity” is the body mass index (BMI) that uses a ratio of height and weight to come up with five body sizes, ranging from “underweight” to “normal” to “overweight” to “obese” to, finally, “morbidly obese.” Wann asserts that these terms medicalize natural human diversity.

The BMI is described by Julie Guthman (2013) as a tool used to “reflect the relationship of body fat or adipose tissue to lean body mass in a way that can somehow determine excessive adiposity” (p. 266). She notes that this crude and inaccurate way of determining adiposity (and therefore who is “overweight”) does not, in fact, measure fat. Rather, the BMI is a mathematical equation based on a ratio of weight-to-height measurements that was not originally intended to be used at the individual level to clinically assess health in relation to body size. Guthman posits that the BMI, along with other tools, builds a nebulous relationship between size and pathology

and inaccurately suggests that there will be serious negative health outcomes for all individuals deemed “obese” or “morbidly obese.” In this way, the BMI constructs “obesity” as a medical problem.

Heather Brown (2016) observes that fat activists and scholars challenge dominant “obesity” discourse that “constructs fatness as a medical issue and only a medical issue” (p. 203), noting how such discourse is layered with political and anti-fat rhetoric. Understanding “obesity” in a one-dimensional medical way discounts the complexities of the lived experiences of fat people. Within a dominant “obesity” frame, Brown adds that fatness is understood as temporary and the sole responsibility of the fat person. Thus “the fat person becomes a pariah, responsible for all the hate and bias aimed at her or him, issues that would go away if only the fat person would just lose weight” (p. 204).

Thus, in solidarity with many fat scholars and activists who do the same, I will continue to put the “O-words” such as “overweight” and “obesity” in quotations to strip them of their power to do harm and to challenge dominant “obesity” discourse. Like other fat scholars and activists, I also have also chosen to use the word “fat” to disrupt dominant “obesity” discourse. While the word is used intentionally by many as an insult, Charlotte Cooper (1998) asserts that using fat in the way I do is “about reclaiming a word which has been used to hurt, and substituting its destructive power for a more positive and descriptive meaning” (p. 9).

As Guthman (2013) notes, taking on the “obesity” epidemic as a social construction is a “powerful provocation” (p. 264). A large majority of the Western world subscribes to this term and the moral framework it provides. However, dominant “obesity” discourse and the fat oppression it encourages have dramatic negative implications for the lives of all fat people, and relevant to my research, fat women in particular. I will address these in more detail in the next

chapter but suffice to say that fat oppression is felt in all aspects of fat women's lives, including health care, the legal system, employment, and interpersonal relationships (Nutter et al., 2018). Fat oppression is also rife in educational settings, both formal and informal (Cameron & Russell, 2016b). I am particularly interested in the ways that "public pedagogy" in sites like social media, teaches people what it means to be fat (Monaghan et al., 2019). My research zeroes in on one site of public pedagogy: social media.

Description of Research Study

In my thesis, I critically examined how the #effyourbeautystandards Instagram account acts as a site of public pedagogy. By doing so, I sought to understand the ways in which it may, or may not, actually challenge hegemonic beauty standards. I also hoped to uncover what meanings are made for, about, and by fat women specifically in relation to the connection between body positivity and beauty standards. This inquiry was undertaken to understand how fat women interact with and respond to the account by examining their choices to participate in it through various forms of self-representation. I analyzed photos, videos, and attached text that were shared in December 2019 to shed insight on the experiences of fat women in this particular social media space.

Curious about where and what kinds of power exist for fat women involved in the Instagram community of #effyourbeautystandards and how it moves through their interactions, this inquiry called into question whether and how participation serves fat women. Which fat women are participating? How do they choose to represent themselves? How does, or could, #effyourbeautystandards act as a site for fat public pedagogy? I suspected that given its emphasis on beauty standards and the fashion industry, a closer look at #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram would uncover that it positions only a certain type of fat woman's body as acceptable,

leaving a large majority of women whose bodies are not the “right” shape, size, or colour still unrepresented and perhaps even further oppressed if they are left out of a new standard of “acceptable” fatness.

I acknowledge that folks of all genders experience the pressure of conforming to a particular body size as well as experience the pain and exclusion of lack of visibility and positive representation. I try to work to be an ally to the queer community and thus recognize that by focusing on fat “women” only, I took a particular gendered approach that limits my research. However, as a fat woman myself, I was keen to understand the experiences of other fat women and I needed to limit the scope of my research to make it doable for an MEd thesis. That does not mean that I expected that all the women participating in #effyourbeautystandards would be just like me. Indeed, it is important to consider here that there are a wide variety of fat bodies, many of whom are excluded from body positivity conversations, namely transgender women and “super fats” or “infinifats” (sizes 26+, which I will discuss more fully in my literature review). When I did indeed find that they were not represented in my data, I included them through noting how they were excluded, which was a significant finding. I also wondered if the lack of extended sizing in plus-size fashion (Christel, 2018) limited some fat women’s participation? While the reasons for exclusion are difficult for me to ascertain definitively, I realized that determining who was participating and how was a good first step that fits within the scope of an MEd thesis, which may be a catalyst for a broader research project in the future.

My thesis was qualitative in nature with #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram as my case study. I monitored the site for one week, focusing on the “top” posts’ photographs and associated text. I used feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007) to interpret what I found. In addition to documenting who was visually represented and how, I was interested in the

language that was used in descriptive text since, as Dianna Mullett (2018) points out that “power relations are discursive,” “discourses are situated in contexts,” and “expressions of language are never neutral” (p. 120).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the #effyourbeautystandards Instagram hashtag and account challenge and/or reproduce hegemonic beauty norms?
2. In what ways does the body positivity promoted by #effyourbeautystandards serve (or not serve) fat women?

Personal Background and Context

I conducted this research as a straight, White, cisgender, female-identified woman who moves through the world as fat. Admittedly, until my late twenties, I didn’t understand what the word “fat” meant to me outside of it being a shameful and painful experience, an identity not to be acknowledged, something to be kept quiet. I have only recently started unpacking what fatness has meant to me and am still doing the work to understand that better.

My early experience of fat includes attending Weight Watchers meetings in elementary school as the youngest person in the room by 20 years, with a well-meaning mother acting on a recommendation from my family doctor. Here, I learned at 11 years old that my BMI was too high. I grew up understanding that being fat meant settling for people’s poor behaviour and tolerating ill-informed concerns about my weight, health, or future happiness; it was what I deserved, after all. Being fat meant other people were always afforded the space to comment on my weight. It was as if they knew something I did not know. Being fat also meant that I felt unseen, left out, and uncomfortable every time I heard (smaller) friends comment on how fat

they were. Having no fat role models in popular culture when it mattered most made me feel like I did not, or should not, exist.

Being fat also meant that no matter what health problem I was going through, it happened because I was fat. I ended up being diagnosed with an advanced form of cancer in my mid-20's, which complicated an already unhealthy relationship with my young fat body. I was at my thinnest with stage four lymphoma. As my exhausted body shrank in the years prior to this diagnosis and subsequent illness, unlike in the past, I was often told "how good I looked." My body carried me through a lot of really horrific things, through the process of chemotherapy, radiation, and a stem cell transplant.

When I got through treatment, I made a promise to myself to start unravelling these feelings of hatred I had for my body. My first step in doing so was finding representation and my own voice through the riot grrl feminism in the DIY attitude of zine culture. I read stories that resembled mine, by creative weirdos who could not find themselves anywhere so they reclaimed their own spaces to exist. I fell in love with the idea of questioning power and authority, and found some of my own power there.

Then I met Sandie. We took our undergrad degree in sociology together. She had already done a lot of work on learning about fatness and body positivity in ways I had no idea existed, but needed so badly in my life. She shared her knowledge with me and the conversations we had helped us both to connect sociological ideologies with the pain and exclusion we were feeling as fat women. Sandie introduced me to an online site called Tumblr, and it was here that I was able to see fat women posting photos of well-styled outfits in a variety of fashion styles. They shared tips and tricks and reviews, including where they were able to source clothing options. This exchange of knowledge was facilitated all without anyone having any kind of financial interest.

It was an incredible place for me to find a voice, and to also stop settling for shopping in stores where the only thing I could find was accessories. I am so thankful that she and I still continue to have these important conversations as fat women who are trying to continue to maneuver our way through adulthood, marriage, and all the other steps of our lives.

Positive and realistic visibility and representation of diverse body sizes is something that was long missing from my own life and continues to be mostly absent in the social media that saturates our lives. Impossible expectations of beauty and body size are layered over the bodies we do see, creating fictional bodies and false representations and standards of beauty that can never be reached. Worse, these expectations reproduce a false dichotomy of fat and thin bodies, to which meanings have been ascribed such as the healthiness, worthiness, and desirability of thin bodies and the undisciplined, undesirability, and unruliness of fat bodies. Further, these images create and reinforce a culture of fatphobia that is a brutal force of power that acts on fat women's bodies in negative ways, particularly as it intersects with other harmful forms of oppression (Friedman et al., 2019).

Still, we fat women are resilient in the face of a fatphobic climate and have found ways to connect, support each other, and exchange knowledge on how to maneuver through the world in our bodies, reclaiming space to nurture the grey area between the harmful dichotomous extremes of thin and fat. My own thesis research builds on this legacy of fat activism and scholarship and hopefully will contribute to it.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As mentioned in the previous chapter, by doing this thesis work I hope to join the growing number of academics working in fat studies and fat pedagogy who critique archaic and thinly veiled fatphobic notions of “obesity” and exploring the various social contexts that enable such oppression to flourish. One such academic is Amy Farrell. She (2011) describes fat studies as a field that critiques dominant obesity discourse and seeks to shift the focus of interrogation away from individual fat bodies and move more towards the systems and structures that uphold fat oppression. Beyond such deconstructive work that needs to be done, fat studies and fat pedagogy also have a reconstructive intent, seeking to provide platforms for identifying and building fat-positive culture. Doing so includes fostering alliances between fat activists and the academy. In their edited book, *The Fat Pedagogy Reader*, Erin Cameron and Constance Russell (2016b) posit that, “Bodies are integral in teaching and learning no matter the context or topic” (p. 5). Fat pedagogy employs the diverse individual contexts and lived experiences of fat people as sites for critical education with the intent of both disrupting weight-based oppression and creating conditions for all bodies to flourish (Russell, 2020). That includes public pedagogies such as what is afforded through social media.

My research critically examines the relationship between the body positivity movement and #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram as an important site of fat public pedagogy. I sought to expose how the social media site may, or may not, challenge hegemonic beauty standards and in what ways. As I discuss in this literature review, there is little research on how fat women interact with Instagram, particularly as it relates to the body positivity movement. My hope was that my research could highlight how body positivity on Instagram acts as a complex site of

public pedagogy, where fat and other oppressions may be reproduced but also where there are opportunities to learn about the rich experiences of a variety of fat women.

To set the stage, I discuss in this literature review how fatphobia and fat oppression have very real impacts on the lives of fat women. I then describe the concept of hegemony as it relates to feminine beauty expectations and the need for fat feminism as an ideological framework for this research and how it fits within the historical context of fat activism. Lastly, I connect all of this to the concept of fat public pedagogy.

Fatphobia and Fat Oppression

As I described in the first chapter, I have experienced firsthand the detrimental effects of fatphobia and fat oppression while navigating the world as a fat woman, whether from unsolicited concerns about my health, happiness, or general well-being, exclusion from events, misrepresentation in the media, flippant insults veiled thinly by “good intentions,” or just the day-to-day hyper-awareness of the disdain people have for my fat body existing in the world. My presence, and that of other fat women like me, seems to trigger alarm bells and signal danger to others who have internalized the fatphobia of our culture. It is important to explore the panic and fear induced by the loaded term “fat” in order to better understand how, where, and in what ways it manifests power acting on the everyday experiences of fat women.

A growing body of interdisciplinary academic research describes “obesity” as a pathological medical, psychological, and social phenomenon (Farrell, 2010). Having a fat body, often referred to as being “obese” in the pseudo-medical terminology currently in vogue, is framed as a problem that requires a solution, which as Farrell (2010) notes, generally means the physical reduction of the individual fat body and the elimination of the potential for people, especially children, to become fat.

The implications of framing fatness as “obesity” are vast. Chris Shilling (2008) posits that probing the ways in which bodies are “marked, modified, nourished, educated and experienced” (p. 9) sheds light on the prejudices and preoccupations of society. How a fat body is perceived is less about the specifics of her physical body itself and more about what her body signifies and communicates in the culture in which it exists (Shilling, 2008). Currently, a fat body signifies laziness, gluttony, weakness, and a lack of willpower (Farrell, 2011).

Given the way fatness is framed, it is no wonder that in the past few decades there has been a rise in “fat phobia,” which Beatrice Robinson, Lane Bacon, and Julia O’Reilly (1993) define as a “pathological fear of fatness which is often manifested as negative attitudes and stereotypes about fat people” (p. 468). Fat phobia is a driving force behind the very real negative experiences of fat women. In the coming sections, I illustrate how fat oppression is maintained through fat hatred that misrepresents fat women’s bodies (including their physical health, worth, and ability) and, given the false dichotomy of fat and thin, results in fat women being seen as inferior to their thinner counterparts.

In her book, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*, Farrell (2011) provides a concise history of fat stigma in Western culture over the last century. Farrell weaves together an account of the historical shifts in the portrayal of fat bodies with the progression of capitalism in Western society. She documents how a fat body was seen in early 19th century America as a physical marker of wealth and prosperity but also of greed and gluttony. As the physical embodiment of excess and greed, the fat body took the fall for the evils of modern capitalism such as monopolies, corporate greed, and government corruption. Fat bodies also were and are positioned as burdens to progress, which facilitates fat bodies being portrayed in the

media as grotesque spectacles to be gawked at. Farrell's historical account traces the way the fat body became stigmatized over time.

According to Robert Carels and Janet Latner (2016), fat stigma takes many forms, playing out in negative attitudes, preconceived judgements or stereotypes, verbal and physical assault, and physical barriers. A study conducted by Rebecca Puhl and Chelsea Heuer (2009) illuminates how weight bias is a source of systemic oppression in education, health care, relationships, and the work force. They note that many studies have “demonstrated that obese people are stereotyped as being lazy, unintelligent, unsuccessful, and lacking in self-discipline” (p. 941), leaving fat people vulnerable to “prejudice and unequal treatment because of their body weight” (p. 941). Samantha Nutter, Shelly Russell-Mayhew, Nancy Ellard, and John Ellard (2018) highlight how these effects are heightened depending on an individual's specific social location, demonstrating why intersectional analyses are so important: “Weight bias is a pervasive and persistent form of oppression, which intersects with other forms of oppression to impact the lives of individuals with large bodies in all areas of society” (p. 98).

Cat Pausé (2017) elaborates on the “cultural meaning and consequence” (p. 510) of fat stigma, observing that it is currently framed by neoliberal notions of individual responsibility. That means fat people are held responsible for any health problems they might encounter, which has profound consequences for fat women, such as less access to health care, including preventative health care. Even with such access, Jennifer Lee and Pausé (2016) found that fat women are less likely to receive bias-free health care thus are more likely to experience poor health outcomes. Some of the barriers are physical such as inadequately sized equipment like gowns, tables, and blood pressure cuffs (Lee & Pausé, 2016), but the biggest factor contributing to fat people avoiding health care settings is the unhelpful or unsolicited weight-loss advice

(Drury et al., 2002) and blatant anti-fat attitudes demonstrated by health care providers (Merrill & Grassley, 2008). These examples of the way fat stigma is embodied in health care pose serious short-term and long-term risks to the mental and physical health of fat women.

Fat stigma is also prevalent in the workplace. Indeed, after reviewing several decades of research on access to employment and capital, Puhl and Heuer (2009) found that “social inequalities resulting from weight discrimination are especially apparent in employment settings” (p. 74). They note that fat people, despite having identical qualifications and job performance as their thinner coworkers, were consistently seen as less desirable members of the workplace thus less likely to be hired in the first place or be offered promotions. They also are paid less, which, when one considers the existence of the gender wage-gap (in which women earn less for equal work), makes it particularly hard for fat women as does the glass ceiling that all women still bump up against.

Formal education is also a site where fat stigma leads to oppression of fat girls and women. Hanna McNinch (2016) found that fat girls are more likely to have experienced fat bullying in school not only by peers but often also at the hands of their teachers. She argues that this specific type of bullying is rarely addressed and indeed “blatantly tolerated if not perpetuated by adults in power” (p. 113) in school environments. Further, Richard Pringle and Darren Powell (2016) found that girls deemed to be fat and who are bullied in school can “lose friends, suffer poor self-esteem, and eventually dread going to school” (p. 123), can acquire disordered eating patterns, or may drop out of school altogether to escape ridicule. Fat oppression of women persists in post-secondary settings. Tracy Royce (2016) describes how fat students encounter “peer rejection, harsh evaluations from instructors, lower college acceptance rates, harassment, and sometimes even dismissal” (p. 23), and the fat college women in Heather Brown’s (2018)

study described the ways in which classroom design and furniture made them self-conscious and impeded their learning.

Another area where fat stigma is apparent is in social media, which is of direct relevance to my research. Pausé (2015) explores the work being done by fat activists and scholars in the “Fatosphere” to interrogate the ways in which fat stigma is reproduced and also challenged on social media. Using Instagram as an example, Sophia Caldeira and Sander DeRidder (2017) argue that much of social media privileges a very narrow view of feminine beauty. The ideal body is a thin body and also is most often White, able, and adheres to conventional beauty standards. This highly exclusionary ideal body becomes a “near-impossible standard that women compare themselves to” (p. 323), which is often exacerbated by the manipulation of photos through the use of filters and photoshop. Hegemonic beauty standards feed the oppression of fat women, so I turn my attention there next.

Hegemonic Beauty Standards

In order to interrogate how fat oppression corresponds with the gendered expectations of femininity and feminine beauty on the female body, I must first address the problematic possibility of conflating gender, sex, and the body. Sandra Lee Bartky (1997) reminds us in her work, *Foucault, Femininity, and Patriarchal Power* that we are born into a sexed body but are not born masculine or feminine. Instead, Bartky (1997) describes femininity as “a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh” (p. 132) that is enforced through disciplinary practices. Bartky argues that while the bodily experiences and expectations of men and women have differed across contexts and time, throughout history women’s bodies have, in one way or another, been restricted.

Farrell (2011) argues, “the cultural hatred of fat emerged simultaneously with the construction of hierarchies of race, sexuality, gender, and class” (p. 68), and is “linked to overall processes of mapping political and social hierarchies onto bodies” (p. 68). Societal standards for an ideal body size reflect the political and social landscape of the time. For example, before the end of the 19th century, Farrell (2011) states that “only the privileged—in terms of both wealth and health—could become fat” (p. 18), with a fat body thus acting as a signpost of health and prosperity. In contrast, Bartky (1997) states, “Today, massiveness, power, or abundance in a woman’s body is met with distaste” (p. 132). Bartky describes the vast restrictions placed on women’s bodies and the pressure to not take up space, move in a controlled manner (posture), reduce one’s body size, control movement (exercise), and deprive oneself of food (dieting). In this context, adhering to these disciplines are markers of femininity, which are related to hegemonic expectations of feminine beauty.

Caldeira and DeRitter (2017) provide a description of the narrow ideals of feminine beauty that are currently privileged in mainstream Western society such as a thin body, conventionally attractive facial features, Caucasian features with a flawless White complexion, and well-styled hair. These ideals, they argue, are “profoundly exclusionary” (p. 323). It is no accident that these notions of feminine beauty historically exclude people of colour, people with visible disabilities, and those who are not considered conventionally attractive. Caldeira and DeRitter discuss how these near-impossible standards are created and reinforced in the media through manipulation tools such as photoshop.

Francyne Huckaby (2010) characterizes these exaggerated, unrealistic, and unattainable images as “mediated bodies” (p. 76) that “create illusions and virtual worlds, tempting us” (p. 77). These temptations “draw our energies into maintaining and reifying the illusion, which we

live through our embodied beings, instead of living more humanly and humanely through our bodies as they are real” (p. 77). Fat women cannot bear the weight of these startlingly strict ideals and their failure to conform to these unattainable bodies stigmatizes us and reinforces fat oppression.

Yet even some of the most progressive feminist scholars have excluded fat in their analyses even though fat oppression is disproportionately a woman’s issue (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Gailey, 2014; Saguy, 2012). This echoes concerns racialized women expressed over 20 years ago about “White feminism” whose narrow focus often excluded their concerns, which led to the development of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989). What intersectional scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw make very clear is that power is enacted on women unevenly. While sexism impacts all women, it is experienced differently and heightened in complicated ways for women who also experience racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, or fat oppression (Pausé, 2014).

Intersectionality is fundamentally about social power. According to Michel Foucault (1977), power is everywhere, embedded in all our daily practices. Michelle Lazar (2007) argues that it is useful to complement Foucault’s concept of power with Antonio Gramsci’s notions of how dominance is maintained through hegemony. As Bartky (1997) explains, power is often now enforced through the transformation of minds rather than through physical control or punishment, and she notes the emergence of increasingly innovative apparatuses of power that “exercise a far more restrictive social and psychological control than was heretofore possible” (p. 78).

James Lull (1995) asserts that elites “perpetuate their power, wealth and status [by popularizing] their own philosophy, culture and morality” (p. 33), including through the mass

media. As Kaarle Nordenstreng (1977) says, “The mass media introduces elements into individual consciousness that would not otherwise be there, but will not be rejected by consciousness because they are so commonly shared in the cultural community” (p. 276). In this case, hegemonic beauty standards, in which fatphobia is embedded, are produced by elites and reproduced through mass media. Hegemonic beauty standards are so often replicated and so widely accepted that they are taken as an unshakable truth that is beyond change. Here, power is invisible and effective because it relies heavily on the continuous internalization, reinforcement, and performance of gender norms (Lazar, 2007). The physical structure of the panopticon, which causes prisoners to feel under constant surveillance even when they are not (Foucault, 1977), is no longer necessary as discipline is internalized by women who, for example, participate in social media platforms such as Instagram that constantly nag them about their weight on their cell phones and computers. Reproduction of hegemonic beauty standards is not the only thing happening on social media, of course, as there are also openings for counterhegemonic movements like fat acceptance and body positivity, which I discuss next.

Fat Acceptance and Body Positivity

Beginning in the late 1960’s the “fat acceptance” (also sometimes known as “size acceptance”) movement began to emerge in the United States. At the time, the National Association to Advance Fat Americans (NAAFA) called for “uplifting the self-esteem of its members and changing negative cultural assumptions about fat people” (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015, p. 454). Since then, fat activists have built on this movement, initially working largely underground and increasingly more in the spotlight. As Wann (2009) notes, they have been “building resources for self-esteem, fitness, fashion, socializing, medical advocacy, and defence from discrimination, while creating theatre, dance, music, poetry, fiction, magazines, film and

art” (p. x). Russell (2020) reminds us that alongside its work to end fat discrimination and promote size acceptance, early radical fat activists sought to align with those fighting other forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, ageism, and imperialism.

This radical edge keeps getting blunted, however. Part of the motivation for doing this thesis stemmed from me wondering if the body positivity movement on Instagram has watered down fat activism. Certainly, Instagram, as an advertising platform in nature, has commodified the activity of users in order to more effectively target consumers. As Jessica Cwynar-Horta (2016) argues, commodification has exploited independent social movements such as the body positivity movement, and shifted the narrative to one that is “more conducive to capitalist interests” (p. 36).

Yet the internet also has provided a platform for fat activists to construct and develop various action projects. Arguably the most public face of fat activism recently has been the body positivity movement. Cwynar-Horta (2016) argues that the body positivity movement is a place to address unrealistic ideals about beauty, promote self-acceptance, and build individual’s self-esteem. She defines body positivity as:

... any message, visual or written, that challenges dominant ways of viewing the physical body in accordance with beauty ideals and encourages the reclaiming of embodiment and control over one’s self-image through improving one’s self-image and learning to love oneself to the fullest. (p. 38)

Body positivity that is in line with fat activism encourages the acceptance of all bodies regardless of size. Here, all bodies are good bodies and anything that posits otherwise, such as dominant “obesity” discourse, is challenged.

Cwynar-Horta (2016) reminds us that the body positivity movement was formed by a community of fat women as a reaction to the current fatphobic climate. Body positivity may be described as an example of “discursive strategies to contest the gendered anti-fat discourses perpetuated by the media, governments and the field of medicine and institutions of public health” (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015, p. 453). Social media outlets can thus not only be sites where hegemonic body norms are created and reinforced but also sites of resistance and reclamation for fat women who seek to reframe how fat women’s bodies are portrayed and discussed. Body positive blogs such as Marianne Kirby’s (2007-present) *Notes from the Fatosphere* and Leslie Kinzel’s (2008-2012) *Two Whole Cakes* as well as Tumblr accounts such as *Fatshionista* are just a few examples of the way fat women are using social media to disrupt fat oppression, and Instagram now boasts a vast array of fat women reclaiming space and building visibility like #effyourbeautystandards.

As body positivity becomes more mainstream, however, it also appears it may have lost its radical, political edge (Guillard, 2016). Has it been watered down from the political activism it once was intended to be? Whose bodies appear under the body positivity banner these days? Are fat women in all their wondrous diversity featured or just the smaller fat, White, able-bodied, conventionally attractive ones?

As I stated at the outset, there is not a lot of academic research that has been done on the topic. An exception is Caldeira and Ridder (2017) who observe that body positivity sites on Instagram allow anyone, regardless of celebrity status “greater access to the tools of media production, thus potentially democratizing representations” (p. 324). Specifically, they argue that the #effyourbeautystandards Instagram account allows fat women the potential to represent

themselves in whatever ways they choose, freeing themselves from “repressive social norms and beauty ideals” (p. 325).

Afful and Ricciardelli (2015) note how increased visibility of fat women may influence how fat women experience being fat, allowing them to contest anti-fat discourses through such visual strategies. A cautionary consideration, however, is to remember that while Instagram is a site that hosts a variety of body positivity communities, it is simultaneously a capitalist advertising platform and a social media giant that is part of, and perpetuates, mainstream popular culture. As Cwynar-Horta (2016) remind us, “commercial interests hijack these spaces that are meant to be democratic” (p. 41). She draws attention to the countless hours of unpaid labour fat people dedicate to their online presence to maintain continued relevance, and how that online presence can be used by corporations to market to specific target audiences, like fat women. Further, Caldeira and DeRidder (2017) remind us that self-representations on Instagram do not exist in a cultural void, and that Instagram itself is “intertextual and embedded in popular culture” (p. 326).

It is clear, then, that social media sites like Instagram are complicated sites where resistance is possible but so too is the reproduction of fat oppression. There exists, then, a very real potential for the perpetuation of hegemonic beauty standards and gendered fatphobia. That is why I sought to understand the ways fat women participate in body positivity on Instagram and how it can be a site of learning that both reinforces and interrupts fatphobia. I thus am intrigued by its educational potential, which brings me to the last section of my literature review: fat public pedagogies.

Fat Public Pedagogies

Drawing attention to “the ways in which weight-based oppression ... can be addressed within spaces and places of teaching and learning” (p. 5), *The Fat Pedagogy Reader*, edited by Cameron and Russell (2016b), ushered in the field of fat pedagogy, making an important contribution to the field of fat studies. Built on the rich historical and cultural legacy of *The Fat Studies Reader* (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009), Cameron and Russell argue that “any scholar or educator addressing the ‘problem’ of how ‘obesity’ and fatness are constructed or working to challenge weight-based oppression is, by nature of the contexts in which we are operating, doing critical work” (p. 3). Fat pedagogy takes place in both formal and informal settings and allows for peeling back the onion that is weight-based oppression in Western culture to expose the multi-layered complexities of institutional power that both hold it in place.

In her chapter in *The Fat Pedagogy Reader*, Tracy Royce (2016) shares thoughtful insights based on her personal experience as a fat person learning and teaching in academic settings. She recounts the discomfort her colleagues had when it came to dealing with fat issues and their unwillingness to confront fat hatred as a powerful source of oppression, which resulted in the scarcity of fat topics broached outside of fat studies courses. Royce intentionally uses the term “fat hatred” to make clear that the very real invisibility, revulsion, humiliation, and abuse fat people face is taught and reinforced culturally. For her, the term “fat phobia” does not sufficiently capture the power that fat hatred holds and she argues that “calling it by name, and engaging with it in the classroom may just constitute a progressive step towards *unteaching* it” (p. 28, italics in original). I found Royce’s proposal to call out and engage with fat hatred a powerful example of fat pedagogy at work in a formal setting.

There were many other examples of fat pedagogy practice in formal education in the book. Most were focused on post-secondary settings and reflections on the authors' own practice as educators (Russell & Cameron, 2016), while some were focused on elementary or secondary school settings like McNinch's (2016) study of fat bullying of girls I mentioned earlier. Fat pedagogy also takes place in informal settings, which is what is most directly relevant to my thesis, particularly that which falls under the category of "public pedagogy."

Public pedagogy is an emerging academic field that recognizes the meaningful teaching and learning that takes place in settings outside of traditional formal education sites. Emma Rich and Andy Miah (2014) argue that public pedagogy "offers exciting potential for critical explorations of the relationships between the educative force of a range of cultural sites in people's lives and engagements with physical practices, corporeality and subjectivities" (p. 300). Public pedagogy provides a theoretical structure to account for the ways in which we learn the taken-for-granted assumptions of a culture, including about bodies, through the learning that happens in public contexts such as media. Henry Giroux (2010) describes public pedagogy as a "powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces" that "devalue social justice" and construct individuals as both "subjects of and subjects to relations of power" (p. 492).

In her chapter in *The Fat Pedagogy Reader*, Emma Rich (2016) argues that understandings of body size and fatness are produced outside of the boundaries of formal education sites so public pedagogy can "help to expand our collective knowledge of possibilities for articulating alternative ways of thinking about fat" (p. 231). She also reminds us that, "Public pedagogy recognizes that the spaces in which meanings are made, including those about fatness, weight, and the body, are contested and contingent" (p. 232). Thus an advantage of using public pedagogy is that it acknowledges that meanings made about fatness are rooted in a deeply

complex system of power, which opens up space for it to “mobilize counterhegemonic learning” (p. 232).

Fat public pedagogy has been practiced in a wide variety of sites, including performance art and theatre (Baker, 2014; Dark, 2019; Rice, 2015; Rich, 2016), podcasts like *Fatlip* (2016) and *Two Whole Cakes Fatcast* (2010), and fat fashion (Christel, 2018; Downing, 2019). The media has also garnered some attention (Lafrance et al., 2015; Monaghan et al., 2019), including the pedagogical role of television (Giovanelli & Ostertag, 2009; Rich, 2011), movies (Mendoza, 2009), and public health advertising (Lupton, 2015; Lyons, 2009).

My thesis research focused on an understudied site of public pedagogy, social media, which is an undeniably influential cultural force in most people’s lives. As argued by Alex Reid (2010), our interactions with social media are important sites of public pedagogy because they are “places where we go to learn, and places where we learn indirectly as we come to understand ourselves in relation to others and our culture” (p. 194). In this networked world, he says, all public and private spaces, from our private homes to public spaces, are “interpenetrated by social media” (p. 196). To my mind, that makes social media a complex site of public pedagogy with many layers to investigate, because it has the potential to both reinforce and disrupt fat oppression. I chose to focus on Instagram and the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag because they are both currently very popular. Precisely what I researched and how I did this is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

As previously mentioned, my research intended to critically examine the relationship between the body positivity movement and the #effyourbeautystandards movement on Instagram, and whether #effyourbeautystandards might be an example of fat public pedagogy. My research was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag and account on Instagram challenge and/or reproduce hegemonic beauty norms?
2. In what ways does the body positivity promoted by #effyourbeautystandards serve (or not serve) fat women?

To help me answer these research questions, I undertook a qualitative single-case study, using feminist critical discourse analysis to examine a snapshot in time of the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag on Instagram. Doing so allowed me to explore how meanings constructed in that space do or do not serve to challenge hegemonic beauty norms and/or push the body positivity movement forward in a way that is empowering for diverse fat women. In the following sections, I describe what case study methodology looked like in my research and describe the specifics of my case. I then turn to how I collected data and how my analysis built on insights from feminist critical discourse analysis. I close with a description of ethical issues that arose in my research.

Methodology

While there are many historical philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell (2016) concisely define qualitative research as “understanding the meaning people have constructed,” that is, “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 15). As qualitative research is grounded

within individual contexts, social construction of realities, and the meanings attributed to these experiences, it is most concerned with “understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s” (p. 16). As such it does not seek to find “truths” but instead works to uncover meanings made of the phenomenon.

According to Robert Yin (2014), a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) within its real-life context” (p. 16). Indeed, the importance of context is central. As Yin (2018) wrote, “you would want to do a case study because you want to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case” (p. 15).

Yin (2018) explains that there are three types of case studies: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. An exploratory study is often an initial examination of a phenomenon and the goal often is to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry. A descriptive case study attempts to draw a complete picture of a particular phenomenon, while an explanatory case study investigates the “how” and “why” questions behind a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Given the scope of MEd thesis research and that I am delving into an under-researched topic by seeking to understand the representation of fat women in the #effyourbeautystandards community on Instagram, an exploratory case study best suited my research.

An important distinction is made in case study research between single-case and multiple-case studies. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that case study researchers explore “a bounded system (*a case*) or multiple bounded systems (*cases*) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection” (p. 37, emphasis in original). For the purposes and scope of my research, I conducted a single-case study that consists of two parts of the Instagram universe: the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag (that any user can affix to their posts in Instagram and beyond)

and the @effyourbeautystandards account (an Instagram group to which users can subscribe, where content is a mix of moderators' own posts and reposts of selected others who recently used the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag). I pulled out images and text posted by fat women with the hashtag #effyourbeautystandards as well as content reposted by moderators to the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account. (I will describe these both in more detail when I describe the case.) By collecting data from both of these during the same time frame, I was able to explore similarities and differences to gain more depth of understanding.

A researcher also needs to decide whether or not the case study research has an intrinsic or instrumental objective (Yin, 2017). Robert Stake (2003) argues that a case study with an intrinsic focus is used when a researcher is seeking out the stories of those “living the case” (p. 136). As my research is exploratory, on a specific case on which there has not been much academic research, and that allowed me to witness snippets of stories of the fat women participating in #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram, an intrinsic case study was appropriate.

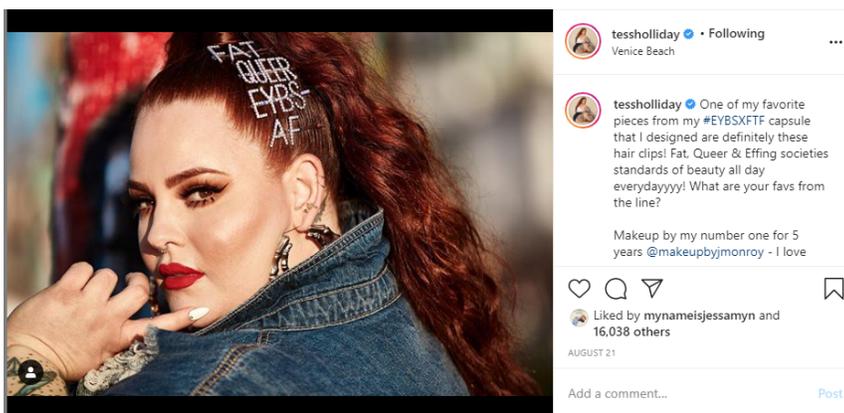
The Case

Created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 and now owned by Facebook, Instagram is a social networking and advertising platform that can be accessed through a computer or, more popularly, as a cell phone application that can be downloaded and used for free. With a current average of 90 million posts a day (Cwynar-Horta, 2016), the site is widely used. Individuals, event coordinators, businesses, and anyone else interested can create a free account by entering basic personal information and choosing a user name. Once a username has been chosen, the account is represented by the username preceded by the @ symbol. The original @effyourbeautystandards account was created by Tessa “Tess” Holliday in 2012. The plus-size fashion model began the account in order to address the pressure the fashion industry and society

generally put on fat women to adhere to fixed beauty standards and she sought to create a space for “embracing your body and being unapologetic” (Justich, 2019, para. 1).

Users of Instagram upload photos and videos to this application, which can be easily shared publicly. A typical Instagram post consists of a photo (or multiple photos) and/or a video and many hashtags. An example can be seen in Figure 1, which is a screen shot of a post from Tess Holiday’s Instagram account. This media is largely self-produced and is shared with what I would call an intention, including to personally promote something, display an emotion, mark an occasion, or showcase life events. User’s intentions are often explained or reinforced by the text they post alongside an image or video, and often takes the shape of a personal statement, a motivational saying, or a poem.

Figure 1. A Post from Tess Holiday’s Instagram Account



Users can interact with each other’s posts by choosing to hit the “like” button (the heart graphic in Figure 1) for images or videos that appeal to them, repost someone else’s post to their own Instagram account, forward the post to someone else on their Instagram contact list (the paper airplane graphic in Figure 1), or leave a comment (the speech bubble graphic in Figure 1). Instagram users can connect to each other or communities by simply clicking “follow” on any account, which then links accounts and places all “followed” users into a “feed” or what I’ll refer

to as a river. Significantly, an individual's "popularity" on Instagram is decided by how many people interact with their posts, which indicates their "reach," that is, the frequency of which their posts are seen and interacted with. Antonia Erz et al. (2018) note that top posts are determined by an algorithm based on tracking the likes and comments each post receives, which then provides a way to rank posts within a hashtag and gauge users' engagement with, and growth of, specific hashtags.

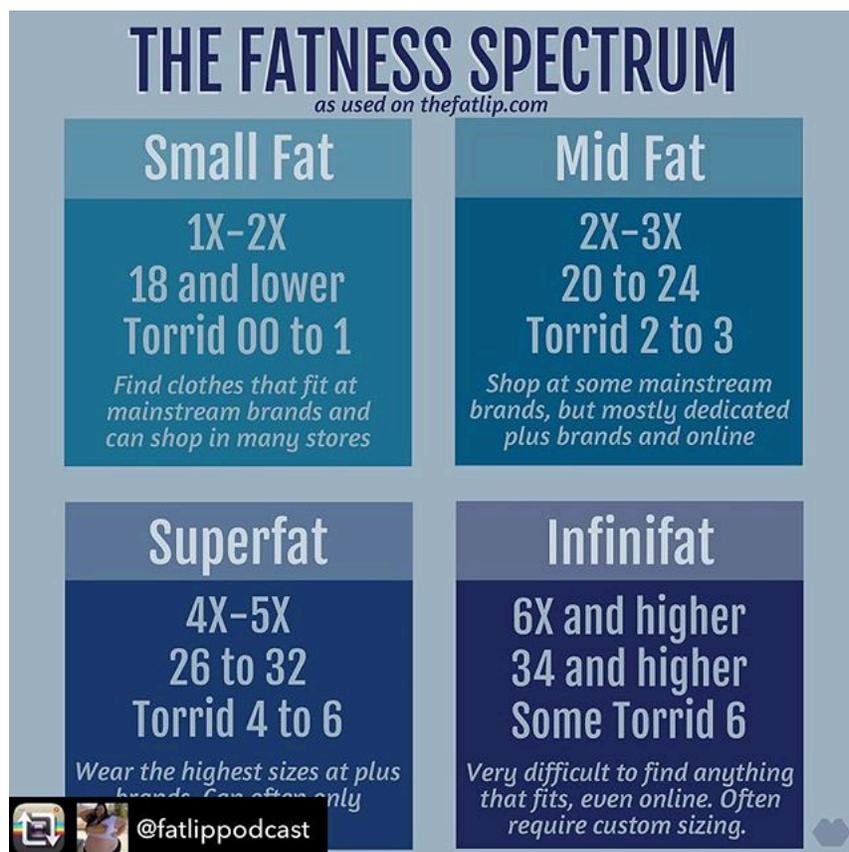
The hashtag is thus another important part of a post because it can also provide more information about the user's intentions in making a post. A hashtag is created using a string of text considered relevant to the subject matter or intention of the post preceded by a #. Instagram users often make use of hashtags (as do those using other social media sites like Twitter and Facebook). Anyone can create a hashtag and once it is in existence, other posts can be tagged with it, linking that post with any other individuals who have tagged their post with the same hashtag. The hashtag itself can also be searched, which allow users to see all photos that have been attached to that hashtag. The #effyourbeautystandards hashtag is thus a pool of images, videos, and text. There are thousands of posts with that hashtag posted daily by Instagram users, all focusing to some degree on notions of body positivity. These posts feed the @effyourbeautystandards account that is now curated not only by Tess Holliday but six other fellow moderators from around the world who go through the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag pool as well as other sources to select images they want to amplify. Given it is a curated account, choices must be made as to what to re-post, which adds another layer of intention that can be analyzed.

Some Instagram users are deemed to be "influencers." These are individuals who employ various social media and advertising platforms to achieve and maintain celebrity status and build

careers by making money through sponsorships from major clothing and makeup brands. Instagram influencers extend the reach of advertising marketing efforts of major corporations by hyping products or events on their social media accounts. They are paid by the post (i.e., photo, video, caption, video) to create “hype.” For example, famous influencer Kendall Jenner reportedly received a \$250,000 one-time payment to endorse a music festival (Plaugic, 2017). The amount of money an influencer makes per post depends on how many followers, and thus how much social media reach, they have, with the highest rates reserved for those with one million followers or more. Tess Holliday currently has almost two million followers.

Fat women of many sizes and shapes use the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag and appear in the curated @effyourbeautystandards account. For the purposes of this research, fat women’s bodies are discussed as existing on a spectrum in order to disrupt the normalized and simplistic dichotomy of fat and thin. I use one constructed by Ash (n.d.), a social media activist and founder of the *Fatlip* podcast who is concerned about individuals who exist outside the world of plus-size fashion, that is, who often cannot purchase clothing because their size is not commonly available in plus-size stores. She places size on a spectrum from “small fat” to “mid fat” to “superfat” to a term she coined, “infinifat” (see Figure 2.). She seeks to raise awareness of the wide variety of fat bodies that exist beyond the newly visible plus-size models who typically are on the smaller end of the spectrum.

Figure 2. Ash's (n.d.) The Fatness Spectrum



This spectrum is useful for disrupting the simplistic thin/fat dichotomy. There is a lack of research done on these terms and I acknowledge that categorizing body types in this way and commenting on size in relation to clothing availability can be potentially problematic. It nonetheless provided a useful reminder for me to ensure I envisioned a range of fat body sizes in my research. Indeed, as my study examined the way in which fat women's bodies are discussed in a public forum, I also acknowledge that different body types may be marginalized or missing from the conversation altogether. In order to ensure inclusion of diversity of fat body sizes in my research, I paid careful attention to the Instagram posts that arose during data collection, making note of the diversity of fat bodies, or lack thereof. From the outset, I suspected this issue would

become something that would arise during the discussion of my data as I had already noticed through casual viewing that larger fat bodies were often not represented. I estimated where the women I saw might fit on Ash's (n.d.) Spectrum of Fatness as a rough gauge of size.

Data Collection

Given the overwhelming volume of posts associated with the hashtag (i.e., thousands of posts per day, translating to dozens every half hour) and given the need to keep the amount of data manageable in an MEd thesis, I chose to limit myself to collecting data from the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag on Instagram for one week in December 2019. I selected the nine photos chosen by Instagram as the "top nine posts" in the feed per day, which as noted above, is based on popularity as indicated by post engagement through likes, re-posts, and comments. As well, looking at the top nine posts added another layer for analysis as it provided a window into what counts as popular in this context. Considerably fewer posts are added to the @effyourbeautystandards account daily, roughly four to eight on average that, as previously mentioned, are curated in the form of re-posting from other Instagram accounts (including posts that used the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag). All of the posts from this account were collected each day.

As data was collected from each individual Instagram post, I focused on visual data, textual data, reach and links to other hashtags, and influencer status. Visual data included the size of the fat woman in relation to Ash's (n.d.) spectrum, indicators of possible race/ethnicity, indicators of possible (dis)ability, indicators of possible age, clothing style, how sexualized the image is, whether the person is posing or what they are doing, parts of the body shown or emphasized, and the perceived emotional "vibe" of the post (e.g., celebratory, sad, angry).

Textual data included captions for images posted written by the user. I looked at what was being said, the general tone of the text (e.g., positive, empowering, negative), whether the caption is a connection to a story being told, artistic expression through text (e.g., poetry, vignette), or any indications of politicization that may hold meaning. I did not include others' comments as data because users are able to manipulate comments by deleting them (sometimes immediately or sometimes weeks or months later) or blocking other users altogether, making that data too unstable and tricky to deal with, especially given the scope of an MEd thesis.

I also observed the reach of each post by looking at the poster's individual follower count and documented how other Instagram users interacted with it, that is how many likes and reposts the post had that day, in order to gain a better understanding of the post's influence or impact within the Instagram universe. Another important aspect of data collection was the consideration of what other hashtags, if any, were included in the post. I documented all hashtags tagged in each post and tabulated the total number of times each hashtag was tagged overall that week in order to consider significance through frequency. I also noted whether body positivity was mentioned in a narrative or hashtag. I kept track of the data collected from each post using the table below (Table 1). Each individual post had its own table and was assigned an identification number to help me organize the data.

Table 1: Post Description.

Post ID	
Visual data	
Body size	
Sexualization	

Race/ethnicity	
Clothing style and other notes about clothing	
Evident (dis)ability	
Perceived age	
Textual data	
Reach	
Hashtags	
Is the poster an influencer? If so, provide more information	
# of likes	
Poster's follower count	
Body positivity movement connections	
Product promotion	
Other pertinent information	

Data Analysis

Feminist critical discourse analysis informed how I approached analysis of my data. Given the amount and nature of the data, I chose to analyze it by hand rather than use qualitative data analysis software. Lazar (2007) defines discourse as “a group of statements which structure the way a thing is thought and the way we act based on that thinking—particular knowledge about the world” (p. 142). Critical discourse analysis is a problem-oriented focused method of research, described by Diana Mullett (2018) as a “qualitative, analytical approach to critically describe, interpret and explain ways in which discourses construct, maintain and legitimize social inequalities” (p. 118). As discussed in the literature review, fat oppression is very real and

present in the lives of fat women today, with tremendous negative social consequences so is an example of a social inequality that is being maintained and legitimized. In critical discourse analysis, power is understood to be organized hierarchically by elites who possess “special roles in the enactment of power” (Mullett, 20018, p. 119) and who can abuse that power by controlling others’ actions. Tess Holiday and the account she curates is a particularly interesting example in surfacing complex power relations because on the one hand, she experiences fat oppression, but on the other, she is a celebrity as a leading plus-size model and Instagram influencer.

As my research centered gender as a focal point of analysis, feminist critical discourse analysis is particularly appropriate for my research. Lazar (2007) elaborates that the main concern of feminist critical discourse analysis is to:

... show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities.
(p. 142)

There is no argument that gendered subjects are affected in different ways and, to address the differences, feminist critical discourse analysis “illustrates that gender inequality depends on denying that particular aspects of everyday life have political importance” (Rogen & Budgeon, 2018, p. 3). Further, Lazar (2007) asserts that this approach remains “attentive to the discursive aspects of the forms of oppression and interests which divide as well as unite groups of women” (p. 149). Digging deeper into claims that #effyourbeautystandards heightens visibility for, and empowerment of, fat women, I was interested in determining whether, how, and where this actually occurs. By paying close attention to the discourse embedded in the images and text used, I sought to uncover the ways in which size-based oppression is challenged, or not. Further, I

wanted to tease out the ways in which discourses may have shifted for different fat women based on size (e.g., small fat versus superfat) and other factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, ability, and age).

As I analyzed the data, then, I looked for trends. When all the tables from each post were considered together, I was able to document who the top posters were, what I could ascertain about them related to their physical bodies (such as size, race/ethnicity, ability, and age), what hashtags were most commonly used besides #effyourbeautystandards, and other aspects listed in Table 1 above. I was also able to code the visual and textual data and identify themes that emerged. For example, I was able to document whether most of the images and text were celebratory in nature, whether they were sexualized and in what ways, and what sorts of body positivity messages were being proclaimed. I was also interested in whether there were differences between the popular hashtag posts and the curated account, and if so, what those might be. I also analyzed data to see if particular groups of fat women represented themselves differently than others (e.g., young, fat, White women). I also noted the way other users react to posts that were more or less radical in their approach to fat positivity. These are a few examples of issues I considered as I looked for trends in the data.

I want to reiterate here the argument made by Lazar (2007) that the role of the researcher in feminist critical discourse analysis is not neutral nor objective, but is instead committed to identifying and disrupting patriarchal ideology. As a researcher, I sought to tease out discourses that sustain a patriarchal and fatphobic social order. Thus, I clearly had a social justice agenda and intended for my research to contribute to disrupting fat, gender, and other oppressions.

Ethics

I monitored the public Instagram accounts of fat women who willingly attached their accounts to the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag, with the possibility that they would be reposted

to the @effyourbeautystandards account. Indeed, all images and text captions were posted with the account users' consent to Instagram's privacy policies, which meant I could access them freely for my own research. Given that I did not conduct research directly with human participants, a formal ethical review by Lakehead's Research Ethics Board was not necessary. Nevertheless, ethical issues remained a very important consideration in my study.

Collecting data from the internet for research raises a general ethical issue relevant to this study that has been discussed by scholars. My study undertook what Megan Moreno, Natalie Goni, Peter Moreno and Douglas Diekema (2013) describe as observational research in that I simply collected data on the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag and account daily. That is in contrast to "data scraping" that is defined by Vlad Krotov and Leiser Silva (2018) as the practice of using automated web-based tools and technologies to extract and analyse vast amounts of data on the internet, which is not what I did in this study. Whether observational or data scraping, the use of such data is an ethical grey area because explicit consent is not asked for or given by those whose data is used in such research. The accounts I followed are by real women who likely will never have any knowledge of this study and who did not explicitly choose to participate. Given my concern about oppression, I prioritized treating them respectfully and protecting their identities. Thus, all identities, including account names and information that could be reasonably tied to them, was left out of my thesis to preserve their anonymity. The one exception I made was the identity of Tess Holliday as she has explicitly chosen to be a public figure and is a celebrity within this sphere.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Many fat women have been using Instagram as a way to connect to the fat community and achieve positive visibility in a world that is otherwise so full of fat hatred. As a fat woman myself, I was drawn to using #effyourbeautystandards as a case study because I have followed this hashtag and account for many years. I wanted to better understand the experiences of fat women in a contemporary venue for body positivity such as a prominent social media site like Instagram. Given Instagram is also commonly used as an advertising platform, I went into this research skeptical of how it could simultaneously be used as a tool for a body positivity movement that was in line with fat activism. I was particularly curious about whether the fat women who participated in the #effyourbeautystandards community by attaching the hashtag to their personal Instagram posts benefitted from sharing their personal photos and stories, and if so, how so, given that the site operates within the heinous landscape of the diet and newly emerged “wellness” industries. I hoped that one of the benefits for fat women following #effyourbeautystandards and other body positive spaces on social media was finding a sense of community in which the positive representations and visibility, as well as opportunities for empowerment that early fat activists sought, remained present.

Collecting data from Instagram posts is a relatively new form of research and it quickly became clear to me that it was a more complex task than I had initially imagined, as I later discovered other fat studies social media scholars examining social media have noted (Pausé & Russell, 2016). While I was able to draw out the relevant data that I wanted, I also realized that there are so many nuances and other interconnected issues that I could have focused on, especially regarding the intentions of people to use social media in the first place. Pursuing these avenues would have taken me in many directions far outside of the scope of the thesis and were

beyond what I could ascertain from the data I did collect. I now have ideas for other research projects that were sparked by this study, which I will discuss in the final chapter of the thesis.

In this chapter, I present my findings and discussion together in two separate sections. I chose to structure this chapter this way in order to avoid repetition and to enable me to draw immediate connections as I went along to ideas raised in the fat studies and fat pedagogy literature as well as fat activist writing. The chapter is organized thematically into two sections: “Bodies on Display” and “Body Positivity in the Realm of Instagram Influencers.” I briefly highlight here key aspects of each theme here before delving into the specifics in each section.

In the first section, “Bodies on Display” I discuss key elements of the fat women’s bodies in the top nine daily photos collected. I recorded these elements in the chart provided in the previous chapter (Table 1). I grouped these into three major themes that emerged: appearance, identity, and beauty standards. In regards to appearance, which fat bodies were represented was important to document. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in order to disrupt the simplified dichotomy of fat and thin and hold space for the many varieties of fat bodies, I used Ash’s (n.d.), *The Spectrum of Fatness* (Figure 2). I also discuss other visible features of the fat women in the posts. I was inspired by Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality to take a critical look at other indicators of identity and experience (or lack thereof) to understand how these might be interwoven with body size and affect posters’ and viewers’ relationship to body positivity on Instagram. Lastly, the third part of this section, beauty standards relate directly to the #effyourbeautystandards Instagram hashtag community as a site of body positivity. Here, I will consider how strongly held hegemonic beauty standards and expectations of the performance of femininity impact the hashtag community and its ability to act, or not act, as a site of resistance and fat activism. I employed a feminist critical discourse analysis to notice what Lazar (2007)

argues are often taken-for-granted examples of hegemonic power through narrow ideals of feminine beauty. As I stated in Chapter Two, even some of the most progressive feminist scholars have excluded fat in their analyses even though fat oppression is disproportionately a woman's issue. Thus, I paid careful attention to the ways in which traditional expectations of femininity and the rigidity of gender norms serve to reinforce fat hatred through the restriction of women's bodies even in a site that may be, at first glance, counterhegemonic.

It is impossible to discuss an Instagram hashtag community, including one devoted to body positivity, without delving into the intricacies of using the social media platform. So, I chose to focus the second set of findings on "Body Positivity in the Realm of Instagram Influencers." In this section, I share the textual and contextual data collected from each of the top nine daily Instagram posts to better understand the reach and influence of both the posts and the women posting as these are important elements in the Instagram universe. The necessity to hone in on this theme was surprising for me. Although I anticipated the presence of advertisements and promotions in the posts collected given the current trend of body positivity becoming its own industry, I did not expect this presence to be represented so strongly in one small study. In this section, I analyze both the hashtags used and the popularity and influence of the posters.

To review, hashtags are signposts that direct users to a different page on Instagram that unites all the posts together, in this case, the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag. Analysis of the popularity and influence of the posters established that every woman associated with the top nine daily posts has a certain presence in the Instagram universe. I illuminate how influence is a large motivating factor for individuals given they make money through their use of Instagram, and I draw connections between the possibility of "cashing in" with #effyourbeautystandards and the depoliticization of the body positivity movement.

When considered together, these themes paint a picture that illuminates the complexity of navigating any world, including the virtual worlds of social media and Instagram, as a fat woman. Much like day-to-day reality, there are complex unwritten rules, veiled fatphobia behind perceived kindness or solace, and myriad ways to continue to justify fat oppression. As this chapter will make clear, even in an allegedly counterhegemonic movement like body positivity, fatphobia and fat oppression lurks.

Before I move to the presentation of findings and discussion, I want to remind readers that my data consists of photos, narratives, and hashtags. Every post followed a similar format that is typical of most Instagram posts generally - a photo provided by the user, which is what is seen first, with a personal narrative appearing below the photo as well as any hashtags chosen by the user. Of the 63 posts collected throughout the data collection week, 55 of them were of fat women while five were of women would not be considered fat according to Ash's (n.d.) spectrum that identifies a size 18 in women's clothing as the minimum indicator of fatness; the remaining two posts were of an anti-diet political cartoon and a solitary glove posed on a fence with the middle finger up.

Bodies on Display: Findings

The first set of findings I want to share focuses on the photographs and relates to the physical bodies of the fat women who were the top nine posters during data collection. By analyzing the appearance (body size and shape, skin visibility and quality) and identity characteristics (race, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, gender diversity) I could ascertain, I hoped to illuminate who is, and who is not, visible to help me understand more about why and how fat women may or may not be participating in the body positivity movement on Instagram. Before I start, I again want to acknowledge that given the fact that this research takes place within a

climate of intense fatphobia, the visibility and positive representation of *any* fat woman's body in a public space such as Instagram is valuable and important so I am not criticizing any of the women featured here but instead systems like the Instagram universe and the attention economy that so greatly impacts who is celebrated and who becomes marginalized.

Appearance

The first aspect of appearance I examined was body size, using the categories used by Ash (n.d.) to discuss the Fatness Spectrum (Figure 2). None of the women shared in their narratives information about their body size using widely understood indicators such as clothing size, making Ash's spectrum particularly challenging to use as an analytical tool given I had to estimate where the women fell on the spectrum. Of the 61 posts that featured the women themselves, 43 showed photos of the entire woman's body, while four showed just their face and 11 were only from the bust, up. Of the 11 photos that showed the women from the bust up, five of those women were showing a lot of cleavage by wearing low cut shirts while the rest had their chests fully covered. Of the 43 full-body photos, five of the women would not be considered fat according to Ash's (n.d.) spectrum. Twenty-six of the women looked to be in the range of "small fat" (roughly a size 18), and seven fell within the range of "mid-fat" (roughly size 20-24). Tellingly, there were no women with bodies larger than the "mid-fat" range, that is, no women who were "superfat" (requiring the highest sizes of clothing from plus-size clothing brands) or "infinifat" (at the highest end of the spectrum of fat bodies).

Considering the shape of the fat women's bodies is also critical because even where there is some acceptance of fat bodies, it is only certain body types that are deemed okay. Privilege is accorded to fat women who hold fat only in certain areas, namely those who are seen to be conventionally attractive with an hourglass or pear shape (Caldeira & DeRitter, 2017). In my

data, all of the 43 women who showed their full bodies lived up to that convention as they each had “thick” thighs and bottom with a small tummy, thin waist, and full bust.

I was also interested in what areas of body skin were shown, if any, because fat women showing any kind of skin on their bodies aside from their faces, lower arms, and lower legs is considered risky given women generally are often criticized for not having a “thigh gap” or having flabby or jiggle bellies (Lazuka et al., 2020). As noted above, 11 women only showed themselves from the bust, up. Of the 43 women who showed their entire body, half were dressed very modestly: fully clothed, wearing pants or a knee-length dress, and short sleeves that covered their upper arms and shoulders. Approximately a quarter of the women whose bodies were fully seen were wearing more revealing clothing such as shorts or a short skirt that revealed their thighs. Eight of the 61 women were wearing two-piece swimsuits but it is very important to mention here that none of those eight were fat by Ash’s (n.d) standard. All women who showed their full bodies had smooth, tight, flawless skin free of cellulite or stretch marks and all of the women’s faces featured smooth and clear skin with flawless complexions.

Identity

While I am cautious about categorizing the women by making assumptions about their race or ethnicity due to the potential inaccuracy and harm of assigning an identity through simple observation, I worry not doing so would have missed important differences that need to be discussed. (This leads me to acknowledge an inherent limit in my research design since I was unable to directly speak to any of the participants.) While none of the narratives self-identified race or ethnicity, some of the hashtags did such as #latina, #blackgirlmagic, #brownkingirls, #melaninbeauty, #melanin, and #indiangirl. Throughout the week, each of these hashtags were only used once or twice each, however. Of the 61 women seen, 35 appeared to be White and 25

to be women of colour (15 were Black, 11 were Latina, and one was South Asian). It is interesting to note that the five women who did not meet Ash's (n.d.) standard of fat were White whereas all of the women of colour were in the small-fat to mid-fat categories.

I'll provide here examples of two posts by women of colour. In one post, a fat Black woman is seen posing and looking into the camera wearing a long-sleeved pantsuit, which is very fitted and shows off her curvy body. She is wearing a lot of make-up and smiling, and has long, curly red hair. She uses the following hashtags as her narrative:

#ootn #bbbg #celebratemysize #curvynstyle #flyfashiondoll #plusmodelmag
 #losangeles #inglewood #compton #hollywood #longbeach #atlanta
 #newyork #plussizeclothing #plussizefashion #plussizeshop
 #fullfigured #fashionforwardplus #blogger #goldenconfidence #fffweek
 #curvygirl #blackgirlmagic #lamodels #lamodel #effyourbeautystandards
 #fatgirlfall #fupa #thickthighssavelives

In another post, a Latina woman is seen posing with her back to a mirror looking over her shoulder in a way that emphasizes her very curvy bottom. She is wearing a t-shirt and tight pants, and her face is barely visible as she holds up her phone to take the picture. She provides the following narrative:

100% real... No eyelashes, no makeup... Just me. Made in Puerto Rico [...]I'm not mixed with anything, I am full blood [...] Boricua... Your New Years resolution is to lose weight, mine is to stay thick, cause THICC girls are more fun. #Squishy #plusmodelmag
 #plussize #ic360curvypicpos #plussizefashion #respectmycurves #bodypositive
 #boldncurvy #effyourbeautystandards #celebratemysize #bbwlovers #forever21plus

#curvyfashion #plusizeblogger #plussizediva #inthestyle #instafashion #styleinspiration
 #fullfigurefashion #Savagetouchglow #fashionnovacurve #fashionnovaplus #webbw_

By connecting #effyourbeautystandards to other hashtags that relate to beauty and body positivity, these women of colour challenge traditional, fatphobic beauty standards that are permeated by Whiteness.

I also analyzed the photos related to age. While it is, of course, difficult to ascertain age based on photographs alone, I tried to make rough estimates to get some sense of what I was seeing in the data. I started with broad age categories and found that the women could be generally characterized as being in their early 20's, late 20's/early 30's, and mid to late 30's. I didn't need any other categories because there were no women who looked younger than their 20's and none who looked older than their late 30's. Through analysis, I noticed that the women were divided in half, with 28 looking to be in their late 20's/early 30's and 33 in their mid to late 30's. Of the youngest group of women, 16 were women of colour, while ten women of colour looked to be in their mid to late 30's. While this analysis of age is only a very rough estimate, that there were no obvious teenagers or no women who appeared to be over 40 in the mix is interesting.

I also chose to pay attention to other markers of identity that, in the end, turned out to not be represented in any way. No signs of physical (dis)abilities or any other diverse abilities were evident in the posts visually or textually. Similarly, there was no evidence, visually or textually, of any of the women being part of any 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Beauty Standards

It was striking that all of the women strongly performed traditional femininity. There was strong adherence to feminine beauty rituals such as well-styled hair and the appearance of

professional quality makeup. None had visible tattoos. All women had clear, radiant skin on their faces and the skin on those bodies that were fully displayed were free of stretch-marks, cellulite, or scars. Indeed, all of the women were conventionally attractive and easily met the expectations of hegemonic beauty standards. Interestingly, 32 of the women self-identified as models by attaching a hashtag such as #model or #plussizemodel to their post, and these 32 definitely all looked like models with their carefully posed, perfectly lit, and well-framed photos.

All of the women whose full bodies were on display also were sexualized to some degree. Thirty-eight of the women were gazing directly into the camera while posing with pursed lips or a sly, flirtatious smile. Their poses included more natural and relaxed ones such as sitting or standing with one leg crossed over the other or stepping forward (which is a common tactic to appear smaller in photographs) and/or poses with their arms bent at the elbows with their hands in their hair or near their face/mouth. Other photos displayed passive and submissive poses with the woman on her knees or poses that emphasized their bottom with the women looking over their shoulders back at the camera behind them.

Bodies on Display: Discussion

I start by discussing the sizes and shapes of the bodies seen by considering them in regards to their relation to fatness. I then unpack the ways in which the bodies are displayed as there are specific nuances that must be considered with regards to the ways in which they were photographed, particularly in relation to selfies. Finally, I focus on the ways in which varying degrees of fatness are presented through a discussion of fatter bodies in relation to Ash's spectrum of fatness (n.d.) as well as the concept of the "good fatty" (Bias, 2016).

Appearance

To disrupt the oversimplified dichotomy of fat and thin and hold space for the varieties of fat women's bodies that exist, I chose to analyze the body size of the women seen in the data collected using estimates of where the women might fit on Ash's (n.d.) Fatness Spectrum (see Figure 2). As noted in the findings, of the 61 photos collected, 11 of the photos were from only the bust, up or, more often, just their face; these photos were typically selfies so not taken professionally, which opens up an interesting avenue of discussion. Of the 43 full bodies seen, five were not fat according to the Fatness Spectrum and the rest were small to mid-fat. There were no superfat or infinifat women represented in the data and it is important to consider why.

Safety and Power in Selfies. Roughly one-quarter of the women did not have their full bodies on display and only showed themselves from the shoulders up in most cases. These photos were typically selfies and I think it is worth digging into how selfies are used by fat women. Sumin Zhao and Michele Zappavigna (2018) argue that there is much to be learned from analyzing the “complex historical and technological factors” (p. 1738) that underpin the use of selfies in general. While current common public discourse typically positions the taking and sharing of selfies as self-centered, narcissistic acts predominantly performed by young people, Zhao and Zappavigna (2018) argue that selfies are inherently political and not the disengaged, passive mode of participating in culture that is sometimes assumed. They suggest that selfies are social practices that embody three dimensions of meaning: “Ideational: the representation of the self/subject; Interpersonal: the enactment of social relations; Textual: the organization of the information in the image” (p. 1740).

Of most interest to me are the meanings made through the enactment of social relations. Given the weight that selfies hold in our culture, I would argue that fat women only sharing their

faces can be understood as an exercise in control and a way to retain power. The self-production of these photos and the ability to manipulate angles and lighting may provide a feeling of security and control, and allows these women to show others only what they want them to see. Indeed, Zhao and Zappavigna (2018) argue that selfies can be a strategy for the marginalised to exist in public discourse in ways that other forms of visual media do not allow. As a comparison, think of the “headless fatties” images that typically accompany news reports (Cooper, 2007). Given the climate of fat hatred in which we exist, that some women using the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag have chosen to share selfies focused only on their heads is understandable and could be coming from a desire for reclamation and a position of empowerment rather than the narcissism so often attributed to selfies.

No Super-Sized Fatties Allowed. I would argue that the complete lack of representation of superfat and infinifat women’s bodies in the data is likely directly linked to the very real fat hatred permeating our culture. Superfat and infinifat women live in bodies that, even in a somewhat fat-positive environment, do not perform fatness in the “right way” either because they are perceived as too large altogether or their shape does not conform to the hourglass or pear ideal of a large and perky bust, small tummy and waist, and thick thighs and bottom. I suspect that because of their superfat and infinifat bodies, these women are less likely to post photos of their bodies online at all or, if they do, they were not popular enough to reach the top nine on any day during my data collection. From what I have seen from my own personal experience using Instagram where I make an effort to follow more superfat and infinifat users, my eyes have been opened to the very real and constant threats superfat and infinifat women face by posting photos. They may post very similar photos to that of other women in this study— photos of their fully clothed bodies or photos of them wearing bikinis or lingerie—but often they

receive rude and violent comments and their photos are flagged by other users as inappropriate or as violating Instagram's policies.

Another consideration as to why superfat and infinifat women's bodies were not captured in my data collection could be that they may not identify with the #effyourbeautystandards community given it recently has become notorious for excluding superfat and infinifat women. Ash (2020) elaborates in their Fat lip podcast blog post "our 600 pound lives":

We infinifat people feel a palpable discomfort from most smaller fat people. You don't know how we fit into your core principles. You don't know how to accommodate us in your spaces. And you definitely don't know how to talk about and feel the trauma of your lived experiences of anti-fatness while knowing that ours are probably worse. And you don't ask. (para. 49)

Much like feminist and other social justice movements have not acknowledged the struggles of fat women (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Gailey, 2014; Saguy, 2012), smaller fat women involved in the body positivity movement have marginalized superfat and infinifat women.

A particularly disturbing example comes from Ash (2020), who has been advocating for infinifat people for almost a decade. They recently brought to light the ways in which the infinifat are targeted by recruiters for the reality television show on the TLC network, *My 600 Pound Life*. Ash reports how casting agents have been following the hashtag #infinifat as part of their efforts to recruit for the show. Ash shared an email they received from a recruiter for the show that invites fat people who are 500-800 pounds to "embark on a road to better health and make the courageous decision to change their world forever" by committing to the one-year program and possibly gastric bypass surgery, all of which would be documented on the show. Recruiters are paid per commitment and these recruiters have admittedly used the infinifat

hashtag and others like it to encroach on and attempt to exploit the superfat and infinifat community on Instagram. The show perpetuates the idea of fat people as a spectacle and, as Ash (2020) explains, highlights the fear and revulsion that fat bodies on the highest end of the spectrum invoke in many, including smaller fat people. While further discussion of this troubling phenomenon is beyond the scope of my research, it illuminates what a volatile and challenging space Instagram is for fat women on the highest ends of the spectrum and could also help explain why no superfat or infinifat women featured in my results.

The Good Fatty. While I had hoped that I would see a variety of fat bodies in my data, I admit that it came of no surprise that there was little diversity in the size and shape of women's bodies featured in the top nine posts each day. In part, that was because of my earlier personal experience following #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram but also because of my awareness of the concept of the "good fatty." Stacy Bias (2016) used the term in her influential zine, *The 12 "Good Fatty" Archetypes*. According to Bias, the various "good fatty" archetypes represent fat people who are deemed "acceptable" in the current climate of fatphobia that exists alongside watered-down fat acceptance. These archetypes create the illusion that some "good" fat people do exist who can be granted positive visibility and should be allowed access to what thin people take for granted, as long as they play by the "rules" and stay within the boundaries that make them a "good fatty" in the first place. For example, a "good fatty" might be someone who eats only "healthy" foods and exercises diligently, so is not to blame for being fat. Further, she would fit with the archetype Bias (2016) describes as a "real woman" (p. 11), which refers to a flawlessly beautiful, model-esque woman who can access the mainstream fashion industry; the vast majority of the fat women who reached the top nine each day fall into this category. Bias (2016) problematizes this archetype and argues that hardly represents the everyday fat woman.

Seeing how prevalent the “good fatty” was in my data makes clear that, at this moment in time, so long as a woman performs fatness in the “right” way, she might still be seen as desirable and worthy. But, as Bias (2016) argues, the “good fatty” archetype is dangerous. So long as a few fat bodies are deemed acceptable, people can deny the existence of fat hatred, which is allowed it to continue so long as it targets the fat people who dare to not follow the rules. As Bias posits, whenever you define something or someone as good, “you’re automatically defining it in opposition to something else—so the ‘Good Fatty’ *creates* the ‘Bad Fatty’—who then gets thrown under the bus” (p. 4, stars in original). Or, in the case of my study, the “bad fatties” like the superfat or infinifat are completely missing and therefore silenced in this context.

Identity

As I have approached this research using a feminist lens, I acknowledge the ways in which the early feminist movement was portrayed as only representing the perspectives of straight, White, cisgender women (Calogaro et al., 2007; Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012), something I was determined to not repeat in my own research. Given traditional Western beauty standards idealize Whiteness (Calogaro et al., 2007), I knew that, in my analysis, I had to consider who was and was not visible in the #effyourbeautystandards community. That meant analyzing the data not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but also looking at (dis)ability and gender and sexual diversity, and how these identities might intersect with fatness in my research. Having coined the term intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) analyzed the ways in which Black women were subjugated on the basis of gender *and* race, and by both Black men and White women. This insight can be extended to acknowledge how all women experience overlapping identities (e.g., gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, class, fatness) and thus can experience subordination on more than one level. While Crenshaw was wary of the ways in which some want to separate out one

aspect of identity and rank types of oppression, she also demonstrated how the experiences of Black women and White women, for example, can be quite different and she made clear that not attending to the intersection of gender and race allows racism to persist in feminist communities.

Unfortunately, it thus did not surprise me that more than half of the women in my study were White and, further, that none of the posts by White women mentioned racism or advocated anti-racism. Still, while #effyourbeautystandards is dominated by White women, which illuminates a link between hegemonic beauty standards and Whiteness, that there were 25 women of colour in my data was nonetheless encouraging as their presence implicitly challenges those deeply rooted notions of beauty. All the fat Black women showed their full bodies in their photos. Posting such photos can be seen as an act of defiance in a climate of fat hatred to hegemonic beauty standards that frame both thinness and Whiteness as ideals.

It is also important to acknowledge that none of photos of women of any race who displayed their full bodies showed any signs of having a visible physical (dis)ability such as a wheelchair or other assistive devices. As well, none showed any indication of illness or disease such as scars, wounds, or signs of ongoing medical care. Further, none of the textual data provided by the women indicated that they experienced any kind of (dis)ability. Susan Wendell (2009) argues that:

The lack of realistic cultural representations of experiences of disability not only contributes to the “Otherness” of people with disabilities by encouraging the assumption that their lives are inconceivable to non-disabled people but also increases non-disabled people’s fear of disability but suppressing knowledge of how people live with disabilities.
(p. 96)

Perhaps none of the women featured in my study currently have a (dis)ability. Or perhaps these fat women, who already face the very real consequences of being othered on a daily basis due to their fatness and in some cases due to their race or ethnicity, have chosen not disclose a (dis)ability on such a public platform. Such disclosure would likely result in (further) trolling and bullying and perhaps limit their opportunity to attract sponsorships and impact their status as influencers, thus costing them financially (which I will discuss in the second half of this chapter). This finding is profound but, unfortunately, not surprising to me given the ways in which able-bodied individuals are centered as desirable in Western culture with its narrow definition of feminine beauty (Rice et al., 2015).

Lastly, the lack of visual or textual representation of the women seen being part of or even acknowledging the 2SLGBTQ+ community was also not surprising. Given that we are deeply entrenched in a homophobic and transphobic society, the performance of gender and/or sexuality in ways that don't conform to hegemonic beauty standards would, at the least, run the risk of receiving fewer likes and could also attract trolls' violent threats. To me, this signals one of the many reasons why fat activists and scholars need to queer their work (Pausé et al., 2014).

Beauty Standards

According to its creator Tess Holiday, the sole purpose of the #effyourbeautystandards account was to have a place for challenging the conventional beauty standards controlling fat women. Holiday began the movement in 2013 as her career as a plus-size model was on the rise. In the first #effyourbeautystandards post in 2013, she wrote:

I don't know about you, but frankly I am tired of getting told what curvy/fat/plussize girls are "allowed" to wear. For everyone that says we can't wear a bikini, show our tummies, wear a pencil/form fitting skirt, wear sleeveless tops... YOU can! I want YOU to join me

and wear daring fashions & stop hiding your body because society tells you to. Break out those horizontal stripes & hashtag #effyourbeautystandards. We will take back our right to be a total babe regardless of our size... big OR small we all deserve to feel beautiful.

Given how the account was launched, it is reasonable to assume that when women attach the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag to their photos, they are hoping to participate in the body positivity movement in similar ways as Holiday, that is, to experience the freedom to wear what they want and feel beautiful regardless of their size. It is important to note here that one of the early goals of the fat acceptance movement that began to emerge in 1960's America was the reframing of negative narratives of fat people (Farrell, 2011). That in itself is laudable of course. What I found intriguing in my data, however, is that while the women may have been disrupting fatphobia, they also sometimes seemed to be consenting to sexism. Here, I discuss my findings related to the limited representations of femininity and the sexualisation of women that were on display in the posts.

Although the #effyourbeautystandards posts inherently defy traditional femininity's adherence to hegemonic beauty standards by unapologetically celebrating fat bodies, the women in my study otherwise performed femininity flawlessly. As noted in the previous section, all of the women were conventionally attractive, small on the fatness spectrum, and carried their weight in a way that conforms to current beauty standards. All were youthful (in their mid 20's to mid 30) and also had clear, flawless skin and no indicators of physical (dis)abilities.

It is useful here to circle back to the argument I made in Chapter Two about how the narrow ideal of feminine beauty is exclusionary (not only of fat women but also of POC, (dis)abled, and gender-diverse women), which is reinforced by the media, including Instagram. Further, recall Bias' (2016) "real woman" archetype, an idea captured in the common phrase

“real women have curves” (p. 11), which is sometimes used by larger (shapely) women as a way of talking back to the thin ideal. It is notable that most women in my study fit into this archetype. Most also fit into another archetype identified by Bias (2016): the “everyday woman” who works to redefine fashion and is “the heroine of the common ‘real beauty’ campaign trope” (p. 11). The “real” and “everyday” woman is the new ideal, and it reinforces the dichotomy between the small and shapely “good fatty” and the larger “bad fatty.” Only some fat women, those of a certain size, shape, and proportion, are granted access to being considered desirable. Thus while hegemonic beauty standards are being shifted somewhat, larger fat women are still excluded. While the dividing line may have moved a little, the yardstick remains in place.

Another fatty archetype that I think adds an important layer of consideration for my findings is the “Fatshionista” or “Fashionable Fatty” (Bias, 2016), a category that aptly describes all the women in my study. Bias observes how this fatty must be able to access on-trend clothing and be able to “adopt practices and identities along the fringe of mainstream fashion” (p. 27), which is only available to women within a specific size range who can access clothes in mainstream stores and have many options in plus-size clothing stores. Fatshionistas must live in geographical locations where such stores are accessible and have the financial means to access such clothing. Plus-size clothing, especially that in style, is notoriously expensive. While these women, with their style and clothing choices, do break conventional constraints built for fat women, most fatshionistas have the same privileges as the “real woman” archetype in that they are on the smaller end of the fatness spectrum. Simply put, the fatshionista archetype is not achievable for most fat women on the larger side of the spectrum.

Take, for example, the American clothing brand Universal Standard that loudly boasts of its contribution to “fat liberty.” Laudably, the company features models of truly diverse sizes and

identities and sells clothing between the sizes of 00-40. It boasts a unique sizing system that de-centres the idea of plus-sizing altogether, challenging the current norm of “straight” standard sizing of 00-12 or 14 and the more rare “extended” or “plus” sizing 12-28 (with anything over 28 impossible to find even at popular plus-size stores like Torrid or ASOS Curve). Instead, every piece of clothing advertised on the Universal Standard website is simply listed by size without the moniker of “regular” or “plus” and is available up to US size 40. Universal Standard has no physical stores, so customers must shop online; an atypical added feature is that when a customer is browsing a piece of clothing online, they are provided the option of seeing it modelled on a body that wears that specific size. The downside, however, is that with plain jeans beginning at \$150.00 CAD and plain t-shirts beginning at \$70.00 CAD, before tax and shipping, Universal Standard’s high price points make their clothing largely inaccessible. This is but one example that demonstrates that fashionable clothing is not accessible due to either a lack of size diversity and/or largely inflated costs.

While all of the women seen in my findings performed femininity in traditional ways and were sexualized to some degree, the women of color performed a hyper-femininity and posed in highly sexualized ways. Natalie Havlin and Jillian Baez (2018) argue doing so might offer a layer of protection to anyone performing nonnormative expressions of beauty that disrupt “white, Eurocentric, patriarchal and homophobic norms” (p. 14), which the women of colour in my study were doing by virtue of their size and race. Perhaps the hyperfemininity and hypersexualization is a survival strategy for racialized women given how Whiteness is so deeply entrenched in hegemonic beauty standards (Caldeira & DeRitter, 2017).

To review this section, I began by discussing the appearance of the women seen in the data collected. I examined the size and shape of the women’s bodies as well as the colour of their

skin. I also explored how their bodies were presented, considering whether the photographs were produced professionally or were selfies. Lastly, I analyzed the ways in which the women conformed to traditional Western hegemonic beauty standards. In the next section I will dive into the nuances of the Instagram context, presenting findings on the women's use of narratives and hashtags and what they reveal about the role of influencers in the #effyourbeautystandards community.

Body Positivity in the Realm of Influencers: Findings

To better understand the #effyourbeautystandards community, I explore the context within which the women's posts occur. A key contextual factor to remember is that Instagram is an advertising platform turned photo-based social media outlet. I begin this section by reporting on the narratives and hashtags that accompany the photos and then turn to an analysis of the popularity and influencer status of the women who reached the top nine each day during data collection. In this section, I unpack the influence of Instagram as a medium and what that might tell us about possible intentions and meanings behind posts.

Narratives and Hashtags

In this section, I zero in on the narratives and hashtags to provide a better sense of the Instagram context. All 63 posts collected during data collection contained narratives that went along with a photo. Roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the narratives were short, with 50 posts being under 50 words and 24 posts consisting of fewer than 10 words. Only 13 posts had narratives of more than 50 words. Most narratives offered little context to support the photo it accompanied. For example, attached to a photo of a fat woman posing on a couch, the personal narrative provided was: "Happy Sunday what's the move today?" Another example was a narrative connected to a photo

of a woman who was well dressed in fashionable clothes and posing like a model: “The three C’s: Casual, Comfy, Chic.”

The 13 posts that consisted of narratives over 50 words tended to be more personal, offering more of a window into the intentions behind posting the photo. For example, attached to a photo of a fat woman standing at the end of a pier in a string bikini, the personal narrative provided was:

At the beginning of 2019 (day 2 specifically) I made a promise to myself to feel publicly confident in my own skin. I always had a fear ever since... well puberty that being a woman with curves there were certain things I couldn't be seen wearing because it would be automatically misconstrued as overly sexual, one of the those things being bikinis: whether it be in public, on the beach, or online. I was scared to be judged by, my family, my peers, and strangers.

As noted at the outset of the chapter, of the 63 posts I collected during data collection, two did not contain photos of women, and five of the women were not fat according to the Fatness Spectrum by Ash (n.d.). For the remainder of this section, I focus on the narratives in the 56 posts that included photos of fat women. First, I considered the politics of the narratives in relation to the body positivity movement. Of the 56 posts, 50 were apolitical in nature (excluding the use of hashtags, which will be addressed in the next section). An example of an apolitical post can be seen in the post of a selfie of a woman from the bust, up, wearing a plain white sweater and a big smile: “Had to get a hair refresh for the new year.” Another example is a photo of a woman sitting on the top of a staircase with her back against a wall, wearing a hoodie with her hands in her pockets and her legs spread wide open. She is looking at the photographer with her head tilted with the narrative: “chill type vibez.”

The five posts whose narratives were political in nature offered personal statements that indicated their hope to participate in body positivity. An example of this can be seen in a post of a fat woman who is seen posing in a mirror from the waist, up, looking into the eyes of the viewer with a smirk. She is wearing makeup and her hair is done, and she is wearing a fashionable black dress. Her post is accompanied with the narrative: “my new years resolution is to crush 2020 between my thighs.” Another example can be seen in a selfie posted by a fat woman who is posed with her hand on her hip in a full-length mirror. Her entire body is on display and she is wearing a fashionable outfit of black skinny jeans and a red blouse tied at the waist. She offered this narrative: “I can’t wait to hear everyone talk about weight loss for an entire month while I stay looking like a snack.”

I also noted the role of advertising in posts. Of the 56 posts, only 14 did *not* indicate an advertisement by linking a company to the post through the use of a # or @. These 14 instead had links to body positivity messages through the poster’s use of hashtags but not in the personal narrative. For example, attached to a selfie-style photo of a fat woman wearing no makeup and plain clothing is the personal narrative “shopping done, now to rest before dinner” and the following hashtags:

#bodypositive #fatbabe #plussize#bigandblunt #effyourbeautystandards
 #goldenconfidence #fatgirlflowfam #selflove #nobodyshame #bopo #plussizefashion
 #whatfatgirlsactuallywear #loveyourbody #plusisequal

Another example is a post by a fat woman who is taking a photo of herself in a mirror. She is wearing tight white bike shorts and an oversized t-shirt, and captioned her photo: “Comment all red emojis for a follow-back” and used the following hashtags:

#thickandcurvy #curvynation #effyourbeautystandards #selflove

#bodypositivemovement #baddie #goldenconfidence

#celebratemycurves #celebratemysize #photooftheday #thickwomen #glow

#webbw #instagood #motivation #idareyou #31andboujee #explore

It was striking to me that 24 of the posts included explicit advertisements for the clothes that the women were wearing embedded into the written narrative. (Others used hashtags to promote a brand.) Here is an example:

This dress is so cute – it doesn’t have stretch in it though, so you would need to size up for sure. Shop @yoinsplus to get yours and don’t forget to use my discount codes:

“BEST15” for 15% off or “BEST20” for 20% off your order of \$65!! @yoins_official, @yoinsusa #yoins #yoins_offical #yoinsusa #yoinsplus

In this narrative, the poster (who has a following of 151,000 people, which I will address shortly when I discuss the role of influencers) clearly was promoting the dress she is wearing. Naming the brand Yoins Plus, she offered a promotional code that would have been provided to her by the brand, from which she will earn money for every person who uses it to purchase items. She also used several other hashtags alongside #effyourbeautystandards in this post, including #fashionblogger and #plusizefashionblogger to indicate her profession.

Another example is a woman wearing a one-piece teddy-style piece of lingerie by low-mid range (in terms of price/quality), online-only, plus-size clothing brand Shein:

This body from @sheinofficial ☺ ☺ I love it troop !! It was kindly offered to me by the brand And he also gave me a small promo code that allows you to benefit from a 15% discount on \$49 of purchase until tomorrow! Code: JustinecurvesQ4

As with the first example, the poster explicitly indicates that she was given the lingerie by the brand to model for the photo, and offers a promotion code. She also attached hashtags that not

only promote Shein, but identify her occupation (#plussizemodel and #influencer). It can safely be assumed that this post also was sponsored by the brand.

As a reminder about the Instagram universe, a hashtag symbol attached to a photo connects that photo to the community signified by whatever follows the # sign. Recall that all of the posts collected were connected to each other by the hashtag #effyourbeautystandards. Besides that hashtag, during the week of data collection, there were just over 300 other unique hashtags that were used over 1000 times. That equals roughly 20-25 hashtags used per post collected. Some of the categories the hashtags focused on were body size, style and fashion, race (especially Blackness), eating disorder recovery, and travel. Given my research questions, I focus here on the categories associated with how body positivity is associated with branding and advertising.

I found that 67 unique hashtags associated with body positivity were used 290 times. Aside from #effyourbeautystandards that was, of course, used the most since it was how I first identified data to collect, the second most used in this category was #goldenconfidence. The other most popular body positivity hashtags, ranked in order of frequency of use, were: #celebratemysize, #selflove, #bodypositive, and #honormycurves. Hashtags that directly related to fashion, style, outfits, branding, advertisements, and promotions were also very popular, with 68 unique hashtags being used 245 times. Also ranked in order, the most popular were: #psootd (plus-size outfit of the day), #plussizefashion, #psfashion (plus-size fashion), #plussize, and #plussizestyle.

Plus-size clothing brands were featured in 27 unique hashtags that were used 63 times. The most popular were #fashionnovacurve, #shein, #fashionforwardplus, and #forever21plus. As with the body positivity hashtags, many women also used hashtags to promote themselves as

influencers. Some common examples of these were #influencer or #styleinfluencer as well as #plussizeblogger and #blogger. Others hashtagged their own Instagram handles (names) even though it was already clear that they were the authors of the posts. The prevalence of advertising and influencers, or those who were trying to become influencers, became clear as I analyzed the personal narratives and hashtags. Given their importance in the Instagram universe, I turn my attention to the role of influencers in the next section.

Popularity and the Role of Influencers

I wanted to understand how Instagram as a medium impacts who made it to the top nine posts during the data collection period. As a reminder, the top nine was determined by how many Instagram users “liked” a post. What was particularly interesting to me was the dominance of a small group of posters. Four individual women were in the top nine of posters more than once during the seven-day period of data collection. Given there are at least dozens of photos connected to the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag community every hour, I thought the chances of seeing the same poster twice would be very low. When that was not the case, I decided to dig into the data to better understand what popularity means in this context.

The influence an Instagram user has grows with the frequency with which they interact with the platform. The more an individual posts, and the more hashtags they attach to their posts, the more their reach increases. Being in the top nine means that their posts are the first seen when someone looks up the hashtag, which then compounds their popularity. As such, it can safely be assumed that the number of followers any of the women in this study had likely increased over the data collection period if their post made it to the top nine of the #effyourbeautystandards page early in the week.

At the time of data collection, the entire #effyourbeautystandards community on Instagram consisted of 66,448 followers. The large majority of the women whose posts made it to the top nine each had more than 10,000 Instagram followers of their individual accounts. Of the top nine, the one with the lowest number of followers had just under 1,000 while the highest had 766,000 (which means she had a reach beyond the #effyourbeautystandards community). As points of comparison, according to Christina Newberry (2019), the average user of Instagram has between 150-300 followers while Tess Holiday, the celebrity plus-size model who created the #effyourbeautystandards movement, has around two million followers.

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, an Instagram influencer holds great power in the Instagram universe as their followers are introduced to whatever product, program, or event the influencer is hyping. It was striking that all of the women in my study were promoting fashion, clothing in particular. Influencers are paid per Instagram post by the companies that sponsor them. In order to receive payment, influencers must mention the brands in their posts. As seen in Figure 3, the number of followers an Instagram user has indicates their status as an influencer and/or celebrity.

All of the women who made it to the top nine during my data collection would be considered to have reached influencer status at one of the tiers described by Newberry (2019) in Figure 3. In what follows the figure, I drill down to take a closer look at the influencer status of each of the tiers in relation to my findings since each tier has its own intricacies that needs to be unpacked in relation to #effyourbeautystandards. I have summarized these in Table 2 below and will discuss each category in turn: nano-influencers, micro-influencers, power influencers, and celebrity influencers.

Figure 3. Tiers of Influence (from Newberry, 2019)

Influencer Rates* Worldwide, by Social Media Platform and Influencer Tier, March 2019

	Nano (500-5k followers)	Micro (5k-30k followers)	Power (30k-500k followers)	Celebrity (500k+ followers)
Instagram				
Post	\$100	\$172	\$507	\$2,085
Video	\$114	\$219	\$775	\$3,138
Story	\$43	\$73	\$210	\$721
YouTube Video				
	\$315	\$908	\$782	\$3,857
Facebook Post				
	\$31	\$318	\$243	\$2,400

Note: n=2,500; *represents rate that influencers charge brands
Source: Klear, "The Klear Influencer Marketing Rate Card," May 13, 2019
247372 www.emarketer.com

Table 2. Influencer Status of the Top Nine Women

Tier of Influencer	Number of Women in the Top Nine
Nano	11
Micro	19
Power	31
Celebrity	1

Nano-Influencers. Of the 63 top nine posters, 11 were nano-influencers with 500-5,000 followers. Within this group, five of the nano-influencers were White, with four being smaller-

fat and one mid-fat. There were also five Black women (four small-fat and one mid-fat) and one small-fat Latina woman. The lowest tier of influencers, nano-influencers are not celebrities and are paid \$100 per post on average, which is much less than influencers in the highest tier who typically make more than \$2,000 per post. Sapna Maheshwari (2018) explains that these influencers' lack of fame can make their recommendations of products or services come across as "as genuine as advice from a friend" (para. 4), which echoes Bias' (2016) archetype of the "everyday woman." Recommendations made from nano-influencers can pique the interests of Instagram users, including in products that may not even been on viewers' radar as necessary. They do so by identifying a problem and sharing the product as the solution. For example, a woman who views the demonstration of a foot-peel by a nano influencer may not even know the product exists (or even why anyone might need a foot peel) until they see the (sponsored) post. This, of course, is the heart of advertising: selling products by creating a perceived need (Maheshwari, 2018).

An example of a post from a nano-influencer is a photo of a fat Latina woman looking into the camera with a serious face. She is sitting and her body is clearly posed. She is wearing stylish clothing and full makeup. The narrative attached to the post only relates to each piece of clothing she is wearing and connects to the brand's official Instagram page by using an @ symbol. For example, she linked the coat she is wearing to the plus-size fashion brand Forever 21 Plus by attaching @forever21plus and used the hashtags #f21xme and #forever21. She also made links to #discoveryunder5k (an influencer-vetting Instagram hashtag) and #nano-influencer, presumably in an attempt to be recognized as an influencer to increase her reach. She also used many other hashtags related to body positivity and other random things including her location (#NYC) and ethnicity (#Latina) as illustrated here:

#f21xme #forever21 #comfyoutfit #streetstyle #everydaystyle #ootd#
 discoverunder5k #latina #curvyblogger #yosoyboricua #nyc
 #nanoinflenster #curvyfashion #whatiwore #teddycoat
 #whatsurgirlwearing #everydaystyle #explorepage #ootn #latina
 #effyourbeautystandards #instafashion #lightroompresets #honormycurves #beauty
 #styleblogger #instagood #photoshoot #fashiongram

Another example of a post from a nano-influencer is a black-and-white photo of a White woman. It is hard to discern if she is fat or not because it is a selfie taken in a mirror, and she is only seen from the shoulders up. She is wearing a crew-neck sweater, and has well-styled hair in loose curls that takes up most of the photo. She is wearing full makeup and smiling. The narrative attached to the photo is brief: “a Thursday that feels like a Monday” but she uses many hashtags to connect her post to brands, her status as a model, and to body positivity. For example, she links to the plus-size brands boohoo, boohooplus, and Fashion Nova Curve by using the hashtags #boohoo and #boohooplus and #fashionnovacurve. Even though the clothing she is wearing is not really seen, she promotes two plus-size clothing brands, anyway, through her use of hashtags. While she did not indicate directly that she is an influencer in her narrative, she did use a hashtag to a private modeling account of hers (not mentioned to protect her identity) and other hashtags that indicate she is a plus-size model (#plussizemodel, #curvymodel, #curvemodel). She also used hashtags that connect her post to the body positivity community as illustrated here:

#xopamela #plussizefashion #plussize #effyourbeautystandards #bodypositive #selflove
 #whatfatgirlsactuallywear #fatfashion #plussizestyle #plussizemodel

#curvemodel #curvygirl #boohooplus #boohoo #plusmodels #bbwlove
 #plusisequal #plussizebeauty #plusstyle #allbodiesaregoodbodies
 #selfie #psootd #loveyourbody #plussizewomen #honormycurves #instacurves
 #plusstyle #photooftheday #fashion #fashionnovacurve

Micro-Influencers. Of the women who reached the top nine, 20 can be categorized as micro-influencers with 5,000-30,000 followers. This was the second-most represented category in the study. Within this group, six were White (five being small-fat and one mid-fat), nine were Black (three being small-fat and six mid-fat), and five were small-fat Latina women. Earning roughly \$172 per post (see Figure 3), micro-influencers are very popular and according to Mediakix (2020), one of the first Influencer Marketing agencies, micro-influencers are approachable and affordable advertising for companies. Micro-influencers are thought to allow brands access to niche “clearly defined micro-communities” (para. 11). In this case, the niche community is the plus-size fashion community.

An example of a post by a micro-influencer is a fat White woman who has 8,452 followers. The post shows her from the waist, up, in a low-cut pink top that reveals a lot of cleavage. She has a large, cardigan-style sweater on, but it is off of her shoulders which keeps the pink top she is wearing as the focal point. She is wearing full make-up and looks very well-styled. The narrative she offered was:

Happy new year. May this year be full of blessing, love, success and happiness. Top is from @boohoo #ad #effyourbeautystandards

Here, she offers a benign comment about it being the new year and then makes a connection to a plus-size clothing brand, boohoo and identifies this post as an advertisement with the use of #ad.

Another example of a micro-influencer is a fat woman of colour who has 11,300 followers. The post shows her entire body wearing short Christmas pyjama shorts and a matching long-sleeve Christmas pyjama top. She is showing a lot of leg, as the shorts hit her above the middle of her thick thighs, and she is posed standing comfortably with one knee bent behind her resting on a chair. She has both hands on her hips and is looking into the camera with a sly smirk. She is fully made-up. The narrative she offered was: “One step ahead. One step in motion.” Like the previous example provided of a micro-influencer, this narrative is benign. However, once again, there is ad information and promotion of the plus-size clothing brand Shein in the hashtags she attached to her post:

#fashion #beauty #curves #sheinofficial #sheingals #happyholidays #thelaurenlo
 #shorthairstyle #curls #jammies #xmas #pjs #plussizefashion #plussizemodel
 #curvefashion #goldenconfidence #effyourbeautystandards #curvy
 #thickthighsandprettyeyes #thickthighsaveslives

In the hashtags, we also see her making connections to the body positivity movement and her job as a plus-size model.

Power Influencers. Representing the bulk of the fat women who made it to the top nine, 32 fat women are considered power influencers, with 30,000-500,000 followers. This group was overrepresented by White women, with 17 in total; five of these White women were not fat, 12 were small-fat, and seven were mid-fat. In contrast, only four Black women (three small-fat and one mid-fat), one small-fat Latina woman and one small-fat South Asian woman were power influencers. Power influencers represent the mid-point between the lowest and highest tiers of Instagram influencers, and are paid roughly \$500 per post. According to Mediakix (2020), power influencers are a cost-efficient way for companies to pay for advertising because companies can

afford to sponsor many mid- to upper-tier influencers and thus gain a greater reach than they might by sinking their entire budget into one single celebrity-influencer.

An example of a post from a power influencer is one with a photo of a fat White woman who shows her full body. She is wearing a bikini and walking away from the camera looking back over her shoulder. It is clear she is posed and that this photo was taken by a professional. She has captioned the photo with the following narrative: “Are you ready for the new year? I am @fashionnovacurve AD.” She also has offered a benign narrative about the new year and made a connection to a plus-size fashion brand by attaching @fashionnovacurve and the word “AD” in capitals to indicate an advertisement. Unlike others, she has only used a few other hashtags, however:

#novababe #fashionnovacurve #effyourbeautystandards #newyearseve #plussizefashion
#plussizemodel #thenewiconmodelsearch #plusmodelmag

That she only used eight hashtags used could indicate an attempt to narrow focus to the brand Fashion Nova Curve.

Another example of a post from a power influencer is a photo that features a fat White woman whose full body is seen. She is posing in full makeup in a living room type of setting, wearing a very fancy little black dress. It is clear that the photo is not taken by a professional. She has captioned the photo with:

It’s the first day of the new year and it’s been a great start! I ended up not going out last night because my daughter didn’t want me to (she wanted to spend it with me and how could I say no) so I didn’t get all glam, but if I were to have gone out, I would have worn this fabulous dress with some jeans. I seriously can’t wait to go somewhere fancy so I can wear this. @lovelywholesale__official is where I got it from in case you wanted one too!

Much like the post mentioned above, the woman offers a benign, albeit more personal, narrative about New Year's Eve. However, it is clear that the main focus of this post is an ad for the dress she is wearing. She indicates the plus-size brand that makes the dress by attaching

@lovelywholesale to the photo. Unlike the post above, this one has more hashtags attached:

#plussizefashion #plussize #effyourbeautystandards #ootd #plussizestyle #fatshion
 #bodypositive #goldenconfidence #fullfiguredfashion #plussizeblogger #whatiwore
 #fashion #curvystyle #psblogger #instafashion #celebratemysize
 #fashionforwardplus #momgoals #psfashion #wewearwhatwewant #curvygirl #psootd
 #whatimwearing #bloglovinfashion #curvy #fashionblogger #honormycurves #style
 #plussizebeauties #family

Celebrity Influencer. In my data, there was only one fat woman who would be considered a celebrity influencer. This White woman has 766,000 followers, which means she would collect roughly \$2,000 per post (Figure 3). According to Mediakix (2020), these upper-tier influencers make most if not all of their income from their sponsored Instagram posts. Her post is a photo of her posed with her hand on her hip looking right into the camera with a pout on her face. She is wearing a tight red mini-dress and is standing on a wet, snowy street outside. The photo is of high quality indicating it was taken professionally. She offered this narrative that contained very brief text and hashtag links: “@fashionnovacurve AD| “If I Can’t Have You Dress” [...] #FashionNovaCURVE #effyourbeautystandards.” She linked her post to the plus-size fashion brand, Fashion Nova Curve by using @fashionnovacurve and she named the dress she is wearing by using the name, “If I Can’t Have You” given it by the brand. As well, she indicated it was an advertisement by writing AD. That she used only three hashtags - the brand #Fashionnovacurve and #effyourbeautystandards (as well as a link to her own Instagram account

that I did not include that above to protect her privacy) – indicates that she was intentionally very targeted in her posting, which is common in the higher tiers of influencers.

Body Positivity in the Realm of Influencers: Discussion

Although the fat women using the hashtag #effyourbeautystandards are presumably hoping to contribute to body positivity in some way, I was surprised to see that sentiment not explicitly expressed in the majority of personal narratives that are so important in the context of Instagram. As mentioned in the findings, of the 63 posts collected, 56 displayed photos of fat women that were accompanied by personal narratives and hashtags. In the context of this study, one must consider the content of these narratives in terms of their politicization in relation to the body positivity movement. Of the 56 posts that showed a fat woman's photograph, only five of the narratives were political in nature and clearly demonstrated engagement with the body positivity movement. The remaining 51 narratives were apolitical in nature, although their use of hashtags made some connections to body positivity (which I will be address shortly).

This lack of political expression related to body positivity surprised me. While all the posts that used the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag indicates at least a superficial connection to body positivity, most narratives were short, benign, and apolitical. The few personal narratives that were shared tended to be brief and did not reveal much, nor did they shed much insight into the women's understandings of, or an explicit commitment to, the body positivity movement. When I started out with this research, I had expected to read stories of the experiences these fat women had living in a fat-phobic society, but such stories were largely absent.

As an Instagram user familiar with the amount of advertising on the platform, I was not surprised to see women using their personal narrative to promote a plus-size brand or particular piece of clothing, but I did not expect to see as much advertising as I did. Each of the women

used around 20-25 hashtags per post. While each contained links to the #effyourbeautystandards account, the hashtags were overwhelmingly linked to advertising, with the women promoting specific plus-size clothing items and brands. In his guide to hashtags, Benjamin Chacon (2020) advises that hashtags translate into more engagement by viewers, more followers, and thus “more customers for your business” (p. 3). It is reasonable to assume that the overwhelming presence of advertisement-related hashtags indicates that the fat women who featured the most during the week of data collection were influencers who strategized to make money from promoting plus-size clothing.

As described in the findings, there are different categories of Instagram influencer; depending on how many followers someone has determines their worth to companies, which means their posts also are worth more as advertising. Influencers act as living advertisements for all sorts of fashion, health and wellness, and lifestyle products (Cohen et al., 2019), and that includes fat women. Influencers, particularly those who are elevated to celebrity status, may come to be seen as embodying an ideal type, in this case, the ideal fat woman. Influencer culture has recently been a hot topic of discussion as it has been shown to wreak havoc on the mental and physical health of young women in particular (Drenten et al., 2018). In a report for the BBC, Harvey Day (2019) suggested that a danger of social media and influencer culture is that it “sometimes leads us to derive a false sense of what everyone else is doing” and to feelings of inadequacy. He continued, “we’re being fed a false view of what is normal, in terms of appearance and success, and that our regular old lives just can’t compete” (para. 15). This phenomenon is particularly evident in the fact that all five of the not-fat women who appeared in my findings were power influencers, thereby taking up space and further reinforcing the thin ideal.

What might this mean for fat women living in a culture ripe with fat hatred who are looking to an internet community such as #effyourbeautystandards for body positivity, and instead find themselves exposed to so many Instagram influencers? While the visibility of fat women in public space remains important, the infiltration of capitalism in elevating some fat women (as well as non-fat women) as influencers can remarginalize fat women who do not look like the “ideal” fat women (Bias, 2016) as I discussed in the earlier section on hegemonic beauty norms.

Jenna Drenten, Lauren Gurrieri, and Meagan Tyler (2018) explore Instagram and the “attention economy” that underpins the new occupation of influencer. They argue that in this type of new economy, attention is a “scarce and valuable resource that functions as a form of capital, which, once measured, can be marketed and financed” (p. 42). Diana Zulli (2017) agrees, stating that “attention is one of the most valuable resources in modern-day capitalism” (p. 139). The worth of digital content such as photographs posted on Instagram is directly dependent on the attention they garner, thus justifying the labour and expense that goes into producing high quality images in this context. The impact of influencers on the #effyourbeautystandards community on Instagram is a prime example of this shift to an attention economy and the rise of the new occupation of influencer. As illustrated in Figure 3, the attention that Instagram influencers are able to garner, meaning the number of followers they can attract, effects the financial compensation they are offered, which in turn appears to place constraints on the types of representations allowed for fat women if they want to be a top poster. It is critical to consider what the role of influencers in my data means for all the other fat woman hoping to participate in the body-positivity movement by using the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag but who have not

achieved great popularity and consequential influencer status on Instagram because they cannot afford to have professional photos taken regularly or may not fit the “ideal” type of fat woman.

The size and the race of the influencers was an unexpected and significant finding. All of the not-fat women in my data were White women and they all are power influencers. Further, of the fat women, most of the more popular and highest paid influencers were also White and were smaller fat. The only celebrity influencer was also White. In contrast, less than half of the power influencers were fat Black women, with fat Black women and women of colour more present in the lower tiers of influencer status. These findings reinforce why it was so important that I used an intersectional analysis to illuminate how systemic oppression is manifested within the attention economy, positioning thinner to smaller-fat White women’s bodies as more desirable and deserving of capital.

Scholarship on Instagram as a cultural phenomenon is still quite limited, including on how it facilitates users’ participation in the attention economy. Zulli (2017) observes how “ordinary” individuals can become famous to a “niche group of people” (p. 145), and that can translate into brand sponsorships and financial compensation. Certainly, in my research on one such “niche” group, fat women, many of the women who were responsible for the top nine posts each day had earned sponsorships with plus-size fashion brands. I would argue that the attention economy as a new aspect of capitalism is one that further oppresses fat women and drives fat stigma. As mentioned by Farrell (2011), the rise of capitalism has positioned fat bodies as inherently bad and as a deliberate defiance of progress. Hence, the fat body is smeared in the entertainment and advertising media for its perceived sign of weakness and lack of discipline, and thus is worthy of being shamed and gawked at. In general, then, a fat person typically would not be seen as someone who could profit in the attention economy and rise to the level of

influencer. That is why the body positivity movement is so critically important for fat women. Yet, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, the body positivity movement has become a watered-down and depoliticized version of its early self (Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Guillard, 2016). My own findings support this observation given the most popular users of the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag community are influencers who are profiting from the attention economy. Capitalism has seeped its way into body positivity.

Nevertheless, fat women participating in the attention economy by being influencers is not entirely negative as it is a form of work that enables a woman to make money, something all of us living within the current state of capitalism have to do. Further, fat women's bodies can, and perhaps should, occupy space anywhere and everywhere that fat women want them to, including in an economy where attention is the hot commodity and other women's bodies, namely thin ones, hold more privilege.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented and analyzed my findings in a way that helped me grapple with whose posts made it to the top nine in the #effyourbeautystandards community on Instagram and why, which revealed ongoing adherence to hegemonic beauty norms. I began by examining how the women chose to structure their posts and what information they chose to share (or not share) in their narratives. I also examined the hashtags, paying attention to which ones were used and how they connected to body positivity and plus-size clothing brands. Lastly, I examined the importance of popularity in the Instagram universe by examining how many followers each woman had and what that revealed about her influencer status, which illuminated the role of the attention economy and capitalism in #effyourbeautystandards. In the next and

final chapter, I reflect on what I have learned through this thesis process and provide a series of recommendations grounded in my findings and analysis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Audre Lorde (2000) stated in her influential poem, “A Litany for Survival” that, “When we speak, we are often afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak” (p. 255). The process of doing this thesis has changed me in ways that I did not and could not have anticipated. It has not only sparked a change in my thinking and opened up new possibilities for me to understand my fatness as well as other aspects of my identity, it has also helped me find my voice and reminded me just how important it is to speak out.

When I embarked on my thesis journey, I wondered why fat women participate in the #effyourbeautystandards body positivity movement on Instagram and how doing might serve, or not serve, them. Thus, I critically examined #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram to understand how, or even if, the hashtag might succeed in challenging hegemonic beauty norms. Doing so is important to me because moving through the world as a fat woman is difficult and it can be isolating, and I yearn to be part of a fat-positive counterhegemonic community. Tess Holliday created the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag with the hopes of encouraging body positivity and challenging hegemonic beauty standards (Justich, 2019). However, as a fat woman who has been exposed to online body positivity communities that predate #effyourbeautystandards, I was skeptical.

Alas, my skepticism grew during my research as I saw little of the critical body positivity conversations that I need, and have been reading about in fat studies, being embodied in the #effyourbeautystandards community. Instead, I saw glossy photos of fabulously beautiful (according to hegemonic beauty standards), expensively dressed, immaculately made-up women who were carefully posed in often sexualized ways. And they all were either smaller fat women

or not even fat by Ash's (n.d.) standards! These photos initially stirred up all too familiar feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. Instead of immediately internalizing it, however, I worked to explore the conflict I felt and use my developing skills as a fat scholar to understand the bigger systems at play such as sizeism, sexism, racism, ableism, and heterosexuality as well as the capitalist attention economy. Doing so allowed me to reclaim my passion for this work and deepened my understanding of myself as a fat woman. In that way, conducting this thesis research has been highly educational for me. But what are the educational implications of #effyourbeautystandards more broadly?

The idea that fat women's bodies are themselves important sites of education and learning is incredibly empowering and exciting to me. As Emma Rich (2016) argues, it is important to recognize how understandings of body size and fatness are produced outside the boundaries of formal education sites. Public pedagogy can be fatphobic, of course, but it also can reveal and disrupt the insidious forms of fatphobia we all experience. Indeed, public pedagogy can illuminate and challenge the power of fatphobia when we explore how we learn about fat bodies in popular culture (Rich, 2016). As Russell (2020) observes, it is encouraging to see a growing body of research focused on fat public pedagogies, including on film, television, theatre and performance art, public health campaigns, fashion, and social media (e.g., Christel, 2018; Dark, 2019; LaFrance et al., 2015; Lupton, 2015; Monaghan et al., 2019; Rice, 2015; Rich, 2011; Rich & Miah, 2014).

My study illuminates the ways in which #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram acts as fat public pedagogy, even if unintentionally. Based on my findings, I argue that it teaches us that only certain bodies matter. While some fat bodies may now be acceptable in this small corner of the internet, most are not. Where are the superfat and infinifat women? Where are the stretch

marks and cellulite? Where are the small breasts, the lumpy thighs, the less than perfect complexion, the women who are not considered conventionally attractive? Where are the women covered in tattoos and body modifications? Where are the scarred and the differently abled? Where are the women who do not perform femininity in non-traditional ways? Where are the queer women and the trans women? What does the presence of some women and the absence or marginalization of others in the #effyourbeautystandards community teach us?

And what do we learn about body positivity and fat acceptance from the #effyourbeautystandards community on Instagram? While it does provide space for (some) fat women to exist and connect with one another, I found a shocking lack of any real body positive messaging and certainly, there were no conversations occurring during my week of data collection that would be more in line with fat acceptance and activism. According to Rebecca Lazuka et al. (2020), the lack of substantial body positive messaging taking place on Instagram should not really come as a surprise. While body positivity rejects narrowly defined beauty standards and encourages space for all bodies to exist in a positive light (Cwynar-Horta, 2016), Lazuka et al. (2020) remind us that the popularity of body positivity in popular media, most notably social media sites like Instagram, is problematic. Unlike the fat acceptance movement, which grew from a direct reaction to anti-fat discourse (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015), the body positivity movement largely limits its focus to appearance only, and even then does not reach wide enough to include marginalized bodies (Lazuka et al., 2020). In my study, this is evident not only in the lack of messaging about body positivity and fat acceptance but also in the absence of anti-racist or any other counterhegemonic and activist discourse.

My study points to the reasons why the messaging associated with the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag on Instagram was so apolitical. The fat women who “show up”

and become popular in this forum face high expectations to perform beauty and femininity in very narrow ways. To do otherwise can set women up for harassment based on fat hatred as well as other oppressions as my intersectional analysis revealed. Those women who still wish to be “seen” no matter the consequences and who do have attributes that make them popular in this context (i.e., being conventionally attractive, smaller fat women) are engaged in unpaid, underpaid, or for a few, very well paid labour that mostly benefits plus-size clothing brands. As previously mentioned, the new attention economy hinges on popularity, relying on the capital value of the glance on social media, and this “glancing functions as an economic enterprise” (Zulli, 2018, p. 138). Thus, the notion of popularity becomes inextricably linked to capital value in the context of the #effyourbeautystandards Instagram community and critical examination exposes how neoliberal ideologies influences Instagram. Ultimately it is capitalist interests that are served rather than fat women who embrace the politics of fatness.

How might we disrupt the troubling lessons that are being taught through #effyourbeautystandards on Instagram? I have a few recommendations that run the gamut from small things we can do as individuals to things that can be done as part of our work as fat activists and scholars.

Those of us who are fat can organize or attend fat clothing swaps, which not only helps disrupt the endless consumerism demanded of capitalism but also helps build community with other fat people in our home communities (Tovar, 2017). When we do need to buy new clothing, we also can exercise caution and do some research on the various plus-size clothing brands. Are they accessible in a wide range of sizes, including those larger than size 24? What kind of language do they use to discuss fatness? Does their advertising feature models of diverse shapes, sizes, races and ethnicities, ages, abilities, genders, and sexualities? Do they exercise ethical

business practices? Do they engage in “fast fashion” (that is, clothing that is poorly made and likely to not last long) that necessitates and encourages excessive consumerism and creates more of a burden on the environment (Bick et al., 2018)? We also can prioritize supporting businesses and services owned by other fat women, including those focused on fashion.

Those of us who are engaged in the body positivity movement need to promote positive representations of fat bodies of all sorts. For example, all of us need to ensure that fat bodies on the larger end of the Ash’s (n.d.) spectrum of fatness feature in the movement in order to ensure all fat women are included and to further disrupt the fat/thin dichotomy and hegemonic beauty standards. One way individuals can expand their horizons is to follow the #infinifat and #superfat hashtags and other such fat communities on social media to learn more about the specific needs of those living in the largest bodies. We who are active in the Instagram universe need to support fat women of various intersecting identities and that includes all racialized women, women of diverse abilities, and women of diverse genders including trans women.

While I am critical of the role of influencers on Instagram as a whole and how fat influencers tend to be privileged in particular ways (e.g., White, small fat, conventionally attractive), I also want to recognize that there are very few wildly popular fat influencers on Instagram. Power is not zero-sum so my desire to raise up more diverse influencers such as Black, Indigenous, and women of colour, superfat and infinifat women, differently abled women, and women who perform gender and sexuality in a variety of ways need not detract from what the currently popular fat influencers have achieved. Indeed, those who are comfortable doing so may have an important role to play by continuing to occupy Instagram and other social media spaces, especially if they are critically self-aware and can engage in ways more in line with fat activism. For example, current influencers could add more explicit body positivity and fat

acceptance messaging, or amplify the voices of diverse fat women to increase their presence, or apply pressure on the clothing brands with whom they work to do better at making clothes that fit all shapes and sizes. Or perhaps it is time for us to create other social media spaces that better meet all fat women's needs.

Finally, I can foresee a number of research possibilities that might address some of the limitations of this study as well as help build our understanding of the body positivity movement as public pedagogy. Some exciting possibility lies in conducting research with fat women who are active in the #effyourbeautystandards community who make money as influencers. Talking with these fat women directly would allow for better understanding of their motivations for participating in this movement as influencers and their experiences as fat influencers. It would also be very exciting to expand on this study to explore other popular body positivity hashtag communities on Instagram such as #goldenconfidence and #bodypositive in order to see if the same things that emerged in this study (e.g., limited representation of fat women, the role of influencers in an attention economy) hold true there as well. Lastly, it would be beneficial to explore other examples of the body positivity movement (plus-size clothing brands' use of more size-inclusive models, body positivity conversations in media such as film or television) to determine how well they do or do not contribute to disrupting hegemonic beauty standards and support fat acceptance.

For me, conducting the research for this thesis has been both discouraging and encouraging. On the one hand, I was disappointed to learn about the limits of #effyourbeautystandards. On the other, this thesis enabled me to explore literature and activist spaces where fat studies and fat pedagogy flourish, which gives me hope. I was thrilled to discover how many scholars and community activists are engaged in this work. My thesis is

situated within a climate of fatphobia and there remains so much more work to be done to ensure that all fat bodies are understood as deserving of love and respect and allowed to flourish. There is still so much that can be learned about the representation of fat bodies in various contexts and from the stories of fat women. I hope to continue to do so in the future so that I can contribute to fat scholarship, fat pedagogy, and fat activism.

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