Drew University

College of Liberal Arts

Are plus-size bodies represented in body positive ways?: An exploration of the complex relationship between demanding visibility and empowering audiences

A Thesis in English

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Bachelor in Arts

With Specialized Honors in English

May 2019

Abstract

Because body positivity is a fairly new subculture and social movement, there is only limited research investigating first, how the body positive community is represented in media, and second, how representations of body positivity do (or do not) reflect body positive ideologies. With that in mind, this thesis takes a closer look at the ways plus-size bodies are represented in multimodal media forms, including magazine covers, television shows, movies, and advertisements, and how those representations are repurposed as part of the body positive community. Additionally, this thesis investigates how media audiences interpret body positivity. To do so, I first analyzed representations of plus-size models, who are self-proclaimed body positive advocates, in fashion magazines and Instagram posts, using Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding theory as a theoretical framework. I then conducted a discourse analysis to explore the messages that public and critical audiences can interpret about body positivity based on the constructions and portrayals of body positivity highlighted in Netflix's original series, *Insatiable*, and original movie, *Dumplin'*. Finally, I implemented a mixed-methods, open-ended survey of college-aged women attending a small, liberal arts university in New Jersey, investigating their responses to images of differently-sized models in the context of the ways they talked about body positivity. Simultaneously, I also evaluated the impact of media exposure on their attitudes. It is hoped this thesis will start a conversation about the need for research on body positivity and its representations in media.

Acknowledgments

This honors thesis exists because of the support and guidance I received from my thesis committee, friends, and family.

First and foremost, thank you to my thesis committee, Dr. Lisa Lynch, Dr. Sandra Jamieson, and Dr. Angie Kirby-Calder, for your advice and support. I am eternally grateful for your contributions to this research. Special thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Lisa Lynch, for supporting me and my research every step of the way throughout the creation of this thesis project. Your guidance and encouragement over the last year and a half has been invaluable.

Thank you to the Drew University professors who invited their students to participate in the mixed-methods, online survey I conducted. Thank you to the Drew University students who participated in my open-ended, mixed-methods study. Your responses are a valuable asset to this research.

Thank you to my friends and peers. The reassurance and support you provided me with boosted my confidence in my research.

Most importantly, thank you to my family. I am incredibly grateful for your unconditional love and support. Thank you to my grandparents, Maria and Frank, for your frequent words of encouragement. Thank you to my parents, Julianne and Anthony, for your patience with me and my stress-induced attitudes. Thank you for always pushing me to do my best. I am eternally grateful to have you as my parents, number one supporters, and best friends.

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Introduction

"Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder" is a common proverb. However, as a young, white, plus-size woman in twenty-first century America, I can admit the ways I perceive and understand people (myself included!) and objects is influenced by the cultural messages I decipher from media I consume, as well as from lessons learned from family, friends, and peers. Because mass media plays a huge role in the socialization of Americans, one would assume scholars and researchers would spend more time investigating the ways media portrays social groups and social issues, like plus size bodies and the body image issues tackled within the body positive subculture. However, to my surprise, there is little research investigating the ways body positivity is represented in American mass media, or how those representations are decoded by American media consumers, and ultimately, influence American understandings of body positivity and plus-size bodies.

In this honors thesis, I explore the ways the body positive subculture is represented in multimodal media forms. I am particularly interested in the messages that can be interpreted from the representations (or lack thereof) of the ideologies of the body positivity community in American mass media. First, I explore the ways body positivity is commodified by the American fashion industry. To do so, I examine the complex relationship two plus size fashion models (Ashley Graham and Tess Holliday) have with the fashion industry and the body positive subculture, paying close attention to the politics of visibility and exploring the ways the models demand to be represented in media. Next, I explore the ways body positivity is represented in contemporary television shows and movies, specifically the Netflix original show *Insatiable* and film *Dumplin'*. Finally, I explore the impact of media exposure on college-aged women's understanding of body positivity, investigating the ways in which young women interpret and respond to American advertisements, as well as the ways they believe media impacts their views on beauty. Throughout this thesis, I pay particularly close attention to the conversations about and portrayals of white, plus-size bodies. There are other identities within the body positive subculture that can, and should, be explored in future research, including but not limited to bodies who are diverse in race, gender, body size, and physical abilities, but their full exploration is beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, I use the terms fat and plus-size interchangeably, as the body positive community does not have one preferred adjective to describe the size of larger bodies.

Literature Review

Introduction:

Body image, as a concept, has been studied for nearly a century within multiple-disciplines of research. As I will discuss below, many concepts exist inside the scope of body image explorations, including the distinction between positive and negative body image, as well as the existence of body positivity, which can be understood as a minority subculture and a social movement. Although many studies have investigated body image and its influences, features, and distinctions, there is very limited research exploring the representations of body positivity in Western media, likely because body positivity is a fairly new phenomenon.

Summary:

Minority Representation/Visibility in Media

Scholarship examining the representations of minorities in cultural mass media exists. However, research analyzing the effects of the visibility (or lack thereof) of the body positivity subculture, more specifically the minorities existing within the subculture, has not yet been conducted. A better understanding of the issues with body positivity representation requires taking a closer look at scholarship about broader minority group representation and representation as a whole. Communications and American studies professor Sarah Banet-Weiser explains in her book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* "the politics of visibility has…long been important for the marginalized, and continues to be. To demand visibility is to demand to be seen, to matter, to recognize oneself in dominant culture," (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 22). Cultural audiences receive cues from media on how to understand and value social identities and issues. Through media, audiences decipher implied messages about social groups by observing "*how often* social groups are represented in the media" and "*how* *[social groups] are portrayed"* when they are "represented in the media," (Giovanelli and Ostertag, 2009, p. 291). Media has created a pattern of representing oppressed minority social groups within culture as outcasts, or others, from the privileged majority groups (Saeed, 2007). By paying closer attention to the "portrayals, stereotypes and stigmas" illustrated in media, audiences can obtain a better understanding of how media creators would like viewers to interpret the issues and social groups represented (Giovanelli and Ostertag, 2009, p. 291). Portraying social groups in stereotypical ways reduces members of those groups to limited characteristics, which then affects the ways cultural audiences think of those social groups (Paek and Shah, 2003). Scholars who examined the ways minority groups are depicted in media found evidence "media frequently depict racial minorities and women in demeaning and unflattering ways," (Paek and Shah, 2003, p. 226). Such depictions are dangerous because audiences might accept the demeaning portrayals of minority groups and as a result, develop a distorted image of members of that minority group (Paek and Shah, 2003). While there is much research on the ways racial minorities are stereotyped and constructed as outsiders in media, the same processes work to "otherize" body-size and gender minorities, too.

Subcultures and Commodification

Research explaining how subcultures have been culturally commodified exists. However, there is no published research investigating the ways the body positive subculture have been commodified. Fortunately, research on other subcultures and their relationships with commodification can serve as case studies to enhance our understanding of the relationship between the body positive subculture and commodification. Subcultures can be defined as "groups of youth who [practice] a wide array of social [rebellion] through shared" behavior, who are also "capable of [acting as] vehicles for social change, and [are] involved in dramatically reshaping social norms in many parts of the world" (Clark, 2003, p. 223), along with "rebel[ing] against the status quo" (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016, p. 438). Cultural industries commodify, or sell-out, subcultures – usually through their fashion styles—and by doing so, cultural industries "also weaken the value of these [subculture] items as symbols of resistance" (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016, p. 440). As a result, the efforts subcultures make to resist and reshape social norms are minimized (Clark, 2003). Rather than being acknowledged in cultural media through creating conversations that resist cultural norms, subcultures are acknowledged by various capitalistic cultural industries as groups who can be used to "create new market opportunities," (Clark, 2003, p. 227).

Commodification of subcultures and subcultural symbols leads to mis-labeling and mis-representations of subcultural groups. In their study of how subcultures, specifically the Harajuku, a "Japanese youth consumer subculture," maintain group identify post-commodification, marketing scholars Schiele and Venkatesh explained "mis-labeling occurs when outsiders incorrectly classify something non-Harajuku as Harajuku…. This mis-labeling is often offensive to group members and makes the group feel misunderstood by mainstream society," (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016, p. 427, 442). Despite feeling misinterpreted as a group, Schiele and Venkatesh found "a large number of members refuse to let their group be mainstreamed," and "members try to regain control of their [subculture] group by preserving authenticity, redefining group meanings, and making the group less accessible to outsiders," (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016, p. 442-43). Post-commodification, subculture members attempt to reclaim their group's authentic identity and purpose; by doing so, "group members are able to regain control of their subculture" (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016, p. 443).

Body Image and Body Satisfaction

Body image research has only recently addressed a distinction between positive and negative body image. Up until the early 2000s, the majority of research on body image focused predominantly on the study of negative body image, rather than positive body image (Halliwell, 2015; Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Initially, researchers positioned positive and negative body images as the two boundaries of a false binary, assuming “if negative body image was low, positive body image would be high and vice versa” (Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2015, p. 122). During this time, researchers also believed positive body image was synonymous with body satisfaction, and negative body image was synonymous with body dissatisfaction (Webb, Wood-Barcalow, & Tylka, 2015). With more recent studies, researchers realized body satisfaction – the extent of satisfaction or dissatisfaction one has with one’s body – was not enough to distinguish whether body image was positive or negative. An individual can accept and appreciate their body as it is, while also expressing body dissatisfaction and a desire to alter their appearance (Halliwell, 2015). Now, negative body image, sometimes referred to as body image disturbance, is understood to be composed of multiple factors, including “body surveillance, body shame, and internalization of media appearance ideals” (Tylka 2018, p. 6). On the other hand, positive body image is understood to be a complex, multidimensional concept encompassing acceptance, appreciation, and love of one’s body and functionality, as well as sensing others, including family, peers, and society, accept one’s body as it is (Webb, Wood-Barcalow, & Tylka, 2015; Tiggemann, 2015; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

A major component of body image and body satisfaction is social comparison theory, wherein individuals will compare their abilities and attributes to other peoples’ to better evaluate their own capabilities and qualities (Brown and Tiggemann, 2016; Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). There are two types of social comparisons: downward comparisons, which involve comparing oneself with others who one views as less capable or "worse off" than oneself, either ability- or attribution-wise, and upward comparisons, which involve comparing oneself with others who one views as more capable or "better off" than oneself, either ability- or attribution-wise (Bergstrom, Neighbors, & Malheim, 2009; Whyte, Newman, & Voss, 2016; Gurari, Hetts, & Strube, 2006). When individuals compare themselves to idealized body standards to which their own bodies do not conform, they develop dissatisfaction with their bodies and appearance, resulting in negative outcomes which can include, but are not limited to, a drive for thinness and disordered eating (Zhang, Dixon, & Conrad, 2009; Schooler and Daniels, 2014).

Fat Acceptance and Body Positivity

Scholarly research exploring fatness has existed for a few years. In 2012, an academic journal called *Fat Studies* first-launched with an objective of "challeng[ing] and remov[ing] the negative associations that society has about fat and the fat body," (Aims and scope). Although *Fat Studies* has eight volumes as of 2019, there is not yet enough published research exploring the topic of fat acceptance. As a movement, fat acceptance originated in the late 1960s as a result of fat activism events, published articles, and advocacy group formations (Cooper, 2008; Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). Though fat acceptance dates back approximately half a century, there is almost no scholarly research historicizing or explaining the significance of the social movement. Interestingly, the existing scholarship on fat acceptance has been primarily written by sociologists, including Charlotte Cooper, Adwoa A. Afful, and Rose Ricciardelli. In their essays on fat acceptance and fat activism, the scholars describe how the first fat activists, who were motivated by personal experiences, were men who communicated their activist messages in public media, like newspapers, rather than in scholarly journals.

One of the first fat-activism events in North America was the “Fat In” event, created by New York radio personality Steve Post in 1967, which served to “protest discrimination against the fat” (Cooper, 2008). Later that year, author Lew Louderback published an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* called “More People Should be FAT,” which Louderback later revealed was motivated by his “outrage at the kind of life” his wife had been “forced to live as a fat woman” (Cooper, 2008). As a result of Post and Louderback’s fat-activist efforts, the National Association to Aid Fat Americans, which would later be renamed the National Association to Advance Fat Americans (NAAFA), was founded in 1969 by William Fabrey, a self-identified fat admirer (FA) (Cooper, 2008; Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015).

Fabrey, like Louderback, was married to a fat woman and “was sickened by the fatphobia directed towards his first wife, Joyce, [causing him to want] to take action” (Cooper, 2008). NAAFA was created with the goals of “uplifting the self-esteem of its members and changing negative cultural assumptions about fat people” (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015, p. 454). As Sociologist scholar Cooper explained, fat admirers and therapists Fisherman and Freespirit, members of a “radical feminist therapy collective” called the Fat Underground (FU), established a NAAFA chapter in California in 1973; however, the Californian NAAFA branch was short lived due to conflicting values and practices for fat advocacy (Cooper, 2008). As a result, FU re-established and re-structured themselves as a “confrontational and unapologetically feminist” group with a mission to “[eliminate] the structural barriers fat people, especially fat women, face due to institutionalized fatphobia (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015, p. 455). FU “[disputed] all present myths about fat” and “[used] radical therapy as a means of developing positive fat identities” (Cooper, 2008). Scholarly research connecting the fat acceptance movement to the body positive movement lacks, and as a result, “the boundaries of the body positive movement are difficult to define” (Sastre, 2016, p. 3).

Discussion/Evaluation:

Over the last two decades, the majority of scholarly research on body image focused on the study of negative body image, rather than positive body image. Therefore, future research investigating and analyzing positive body image is needed to better understand positive body image as a concept, as well as its influences, representations, and its relationship with body positivity, as a subculture and a social movement. In addition, although a few sociologist scholars have published literature explaining the origins and agenda of the fat-acceptance movement, there is no scholarly literature examining the origins, agenda, or constraints of body positivity as a subculture and social movement. As a result, it is difficult to understand the ways body positivity’s ideologies are, or are not, being achieved. Further, more research focused on the relationship between body positivity and fat acceptance, and body positivity as a whole, is needed.

Although a handful of researchers have recently investigated and exposed the ways body positivity is commodified, additional research is needed to further examine the ways body positivity can be interpreted and understood, post-commodification. There is not enough scholarly evidence to determine the effects that images and messages about body positivity in media and culture have on audiences. Research analyzing the ways body positivity may be mis-represented, under-represented, or authentically-represented must be conducted. Likewise, research investigating public reactions to body positive representations in mass media is needed.

Conclusion:

There is an abundance of additional research needed to investigate body positivity as a concept, minority subculture, and social movement. Due to the lack of research on body positivity, scholars have been unable to understand body positivity to the same degree they can understand other more-frequently studied concepts, like negative body image. The lack of scholarship on body positivity makes it challenging to analyze the reactions to representations of the body positivity subculture and the body positivity movement in post-commodified mass media. Since there are no clearly defined origins, ideologies, appearances, or political agendas of body positivity, scholars have been unable to expose the effects of body positive representations on audiences. Research investigating body positivity and its media representations are needed to educate society about ways to stop body-size discrimination and improve people's body image.

Chapter One

Commodification, Resistance, and Empowerment: Fashion Images and Body Positivity

Introduction:

Body positivity is a social movement rejecting the ways body ideals are valued within Western culture. Activists propose, rather than continuing to fall victim to the damaging effects of unattainable beauty ideals on self-esteem, individuals practice body acceptance, love, and empowerment. The online body positive community has grown in recent years, with corporations and mass media noticing the flourishing social movement. In response, industries (such as fashion and beauty) and brands have commodified body positivity. By this, I mean industries and brands are creating products, campaigns, and advertisements that target body positive audiences as consumers. Because such brands are situated within a capitalistic culture, their goal is to generate profits; but, another result is media audiences can interpret the visibility of body positivity as a form of cultural acceptance and empowerment of size-diverse bodies. In this chapter of my thesis, I explore the complex relationship between the fashion industry's commodification of body positivity and the visibility of fashion models' resistance against narrow cultural beauty and body norms. I juxtapose the ways fashion brands construct messages about body positivity with the ways fashion models, who double as body positive advocates, do. Ultimately, I argue, while body positivity strives to spread empowering messages about self-acceptance and self-love to women of all sizes, its visibility in popular culture is complicated.

Method:

I utilize Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding to analyze magazine covers, constructed by brands within the fashion industry, and Instagram posts (specifically, reposted magazine covers and captions) constructed by fashion models and body positivity activists

Ashley Graham and Tess Holliday, to show how messages are encoded with different symbols, depending on the differing values of the messages' creator(s). The fashion industry encodes messages with symbols to monetize an inauthentic, exploitative body positivity, such as the commodified images of self-proclaimed body-positive activists Graham and Holliday, on magazine covers owned by brands in the fashion industry. However, Graham and Holliday exert their own agency, by reposting the commodified body positive messages onto their public platforms, like their Instagram profiles, encoding additional symbols aligning more closely with authentic body positive values. Graham and Holliday demand visibility, and in doing so, they show the world plus size women are beautiful. Their messages are then decoded by audiences within the body positive community, who interpret the images in a manner leading to feelings of liberation for many women, as they are encouraged to accept and love their bodies as is, regardless of whether or not they fit within American cultural standards of beauty.

Background:

First, a definitional note. In this thesis, when I address body positive visibility in popular culture, I am referring to white, plus-size visibility. This is not to disregard other oppressed identities within disability, gender, or race categories; I address white, plus-size visibility because it makes up a huge portion of the fashion industry's commodification of body positivity (Caldeira & de Ridder, 2017; Cwynar-Horta, 2016). While body positivity crosses race and gender categories, it is also complicated by them; while much can be said about how body positivity applies to all groups, much of it does not. For this reason, in this thesis, I solely focus on white women, to avoid the risk of generalizing or simplifying the complex systems of power in our culture. In addition, I acknowledge empowerment can be achieved outside of demanding visibility in commodified spaces, such as the fashion industry. Many body positive activists do not think demanding visibility in commodified spaces, such as *Sports Illustrated* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines, would be the place to go in an attempt to feel inspired and inspire others about beauty and positive body image. I am in no way labeling Graham and Holliday's demand of visibility as the best, nor the only, path to body positive empowerment. Instead, I explore their visibility as one of the many paths body positive advocates take to attempt to embrace and spread body positive ideologies.

Activists and scholars understand body positivity in a few different ways. I draw on the works of Jessica Cwynar-Horta, Sofia P. Caldeira, and Sander de Ridder to define "body positive" as a mindset rejecting the oppression of bodies that do not fit within the conventional standards of beauty (i.e. thin, tall, hairless, young, white, able-bodied) (Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 38), and instead encourages "individuals who have been misrepresented or underrepresented in traditional mainstream media" to accept, love, and feel empowered about their bodies as they are (Caldeira and de Ridder, 2017, p. 327). In other words, bodies do not have to conform to conventional American standards of female beauty to be accepted, loved, and thought beautiful. Body positive activists, then, are individuals who embody and promote messages supporting and encouraging body positive principles. By spreading body positive messages, activists are able to change the ways bodies and beauty are understood and valued.

Theoretical Framework:

Stuart Hall, cultural theorist and a co-founder of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, developed multiple critical models and theories for analyzing cultural texts, including the encoding and decoding model. Hall developed the model in 1973, to analyze how media messages are produced and consumed, paying attention to how individuals' understandings of signs, symbols, and language within social and cultural contexts can influence the interpretations and understandings of messages sent through media. In order to best understand the encoding and decoding model, one must first understand how Birmingham School theorists shifted the understanding of audience reception within cultural studies.

Douglas M. Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi Durham (2006) explain Birmingham School theorists developed critical cultural theories with an intention to “examine and critique how the established society and culture promoted sexism, racism, homophobia, and additional forms of oppression – or helped to generate resistance and struggle against domination and injustice” through messages sent through popular culture and mass media (Kellner & Durham, 2006, p. xxv). Early cultural theories, like those of the Frankfurt School, posit mass media as “controlled by groups who employed them to further their own interests and domination,” believing, “media culture simply reproduced the existing society and manipulated mass audiences into obedience” (Kellner & Durham, 2006, p. xvii). In other words, Frankfurt theorists believe media audiences are confined to the role of passive audience members who cannot generate meaning behind the media forms with which they engage. However, Birmingham School theorists, including Hall, believe audiences play an active role in producing the meaning of cultural texts (Kellner and Durham, 2006). They also believe cultural messages are created with the intention to either “further social control,” or “to enable people to resist” and push for social change (Kellner and Durham, 2006, p. xxiv). Ultimately, audience reactions to cultural texts depends on their personal interpretations of the meaning of symbols in the texts themselves. Symbols may have one meaning for one group of people (i.e., thin, white, upper-class women), but a completely different meaning for another group of people (i.e., plus-size, white, middle-class women). When studying culture and cultural texts, it is vital to consider how different perspectives affect the meaning of messages in media.

Hall’s model of textual interpretation was first presented in his 1973 essay, “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse,” where he explains audiences decode, or interpret, different meanings for messages they consume in media, depending on each person’s experiences, identity, and connection to or from cultural symbols and standards. He argues “the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical” between the producer and consumer of a message, because the “degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding'” of the meaning of symbols and language in cultural texts depends on the similarities and differences between the cultural, political, and social “position of the encoder-producer and that of the decoder-receiver,” (Hall, 1973, p. 4). In simpler terms, the model uses the terms encoding and decoding to stress the importance of analyzing codes (or symbols) within each message. Messages are coded with features including images, videos, body language, and words. Producers encode messages with symbols that they hope consumers will be able to interpret; however, consumers decode messages uniquely depending on their understandings of the symbols they observe. Every individual potentially has a different interpretation and understanding of what signs and symbols signify, depending on their experiences with and positioning in social, cultural, and political contexts. In this case, thin, upper-class individuals with access to create texts as seen in public media platforms like fashion magazines have one interpretation of a plus-size body on the cover of a magazine; however, individuals experiencing oppression (disabled, plus-size, people of color) likely have a completely different interpretation of the symbols included within the same magazine cover. Hall’s model of encoding and decoding allows for analysis of the different meanings that can be interpreted from messages constructed within the fashion industry versus messages constructed by body positive plus size fashion models.

Body Scholarship:

American culture is a consumer culture; almost every message from popular culture and mass media sells a product, service, or lifestyle, either directly or indirectly. Thus, the messages audiences decode from mass media are often selling an idea of what is “acceptable” by American cultural standards in order to indirectly or directly increase consumption. “Conventional American standards of female beauty,” and more specifically, the emphasis in American standards of beauty on body size, are “sold” to the public through popular culture and mass media. A person’s body size can be both a social and political statement, deemed acceptable or unacceptable, depending on how it correlates to American culture’s current beauty standards. The ability to have “social control over bodies” is not new; as Jeannine Gailey explains in “Hyper(in)visibility and the *Paradox* of Fat,” for centuries, women have adjusted their bodies to achieve higher social status and seem more beautiful (Gailey, 2014, p. 2). Beauty has never been a universal concept, nor a steady one. Gailey reveals “in the nineteenth century, women wore corsets because those with small waists were granted higher social status and seen as more fertile, beautiful, and embodying true womanhood” (Gailey, 2014, p. 2). In the twentieth century, women’s beauty ideals adjusted to some degree every decade, depending on cultural trends.

Beauty and body norms change in American culture, and when they change, women often express a desire to adjust their bodies to conform to the contemporary beauty standards. Sociologist Allan Mazur explains, during “the 1880s, young U.S. women worried about being too thin. They used padding and they ate” in attempts to conform to the “voluptuous” beauty standard of the time period (Mazur, 1986, p. 285). Historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg explains in her book, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls,* whereas American teenage girls expressed pride about weight gain during the Victorian era of the late 1800s, they made “systematic efforts to lower their weight by food restriction and exercise” as part of the “first American ‘slimming craze’” in the 1920s (Brumberg, 1998, p. 99). During the “slimming craze” of the 1920s, later known as the Flapper era, the fashionable beauty ideal was achieved through a “slender, long-limbed, and relatively flat-chested” figure (Brumberg, 1998, p. 99). The beginning of the twentieth century brought more freedom to women to express themselves and take control of their bodies; however, at the same time, it also brought prominent cultural pressures and anxieties surrounding their beauty and body size ideals. In the 1920s, American fashion trends adjusted to fit the new value of thinness in regards to beauty and body ideals (Brumberg, 1998, p. 107). As this happened, American culture and fashion “had begun to blur the distinction between the private and public self,” and by the 1930s, “girls understood that their bodies were in some ways a public project,” requiring “a willingness to display oneself as a decorative object” and making girls “extremely vulnerable to cultural messages about dieting and particular body parts” (Brumberg, 1998, p. 107). Around this time, there was an American cultural transition from homemade to mass-produced clothing, introducing the concept of standard-sizing. Whereas “dimensions of the [homemade garments] could be adjusted to the particular body intended to wear it,” with store-bought clothes, “the body had to fit instantaneously into standard sizes that were constructed from a pattern representing a norm,” (Brumberg, 1998, p. 110). Standard-sized clothing did not always fit bodies correctly, causing young women “to perceive that there was something wrong with their bodies,” (Brumberg, 1998, p. 110).

In the 1930s, a shift back to an earlier, curvier beauty ideal re-emerged, which would remain popular for the next two decades: the return of the curvy, voluptuous bodied-ideal (Matelski, 2011, p. 19). The voluptuous body-ideal continued after World War Two, but beauty ideals eventually shifted to value the thin-ideal once again. By the 1960s, inspired by the

"California look" and fashion models like Twiggy, young women were fixated on weight-loss, focusing mostly on appetite control and dieting (Brumberg, 1998, p. 120). The 1970s and 1980s emphasized a lean and toned beauty-ideal, acquired through fitness (Brumberg, 1998, p. 120). Then came the 1990s, with a beauty-ideal focused on thin, toned lower bodies, specifically "a taunt female pelvis, sleek thighs, and a sculptured behind" (Brumberg, 1998, p. 125). The lack of stability in cultural beauty ideals explains why women often have a hard time accepting and loving their bodies as they are. Attempting to shift one's body from a voluptuous figure to a thin, boy-ish figure, and then to a slightly voluptuous figure once again, takes a toll on one's physical and mental health. The changing beauty standards, no matter what they are, ultimately benefit the diet and exercise industries, who continue to profit off of customer's body dissatisfactions (Julier, 2012, p. 551)**.**

Some scholars believe cultural norms pertaining to body size are political and social assessments powerful people create to distinguish people who are culturally and socially privileged from others who are not. Naomi Wolf explains in her book *The Beauty Myth*, "a cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience" (Wolf, 2002, p. 186). A changed beauty trend is not an unattainable issue for women who have high Social and Economic status; if being thin is trending, wealthy women can hire personal trainers, personal chefs, and undergo cosmetic surgeries to ensure they fit within normative beauty ideals. Women with minority Economic status cannot afford, and do not have enough time, for such privileges. So, to summarize, beauty norms pertaining to body size are policed by people who have power within a culture to ensure the privilege and exclusivity of the concept of beauty.

Fashion Industry:

To understand how body positivity is represented by the fashion industry, one must first understand how the fashion industry defines plus-sized bodies. Sociologist Amanda Czerniawski claims in her article "Disciplining Corpulence: The Case of Plus-Size Fashion Models" the fashion industry "considers anything over a size eight as 'plus-size.'…. Generally, plus-size models range from a woman's clothing size ten to size twenty, but most of the [plus-size] models in the top modeling agencies are size ten to size fourteen," (Czerniawski, 2012, p. 128-129). However, Deborah A. Christel and Susan C. Dunn reported, in August 2016, the average American woman "wears between a Misses size 16-18, and a Women's Plus size 20W" (Christel and Dunn, 2017, p. 134). To reiterate, the average American woman is *double* the size of the smallest plus-size model, and is larger than the largest plus-size models top modeling agencies hire. The average sized American woman, then, is not being represented by the fashion industry. Instead, she is completely invisible. Susan Banet-Weiser writes in her book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny,* "in a media context…if you are visible, you matter" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 10). The absence of representation of average sized American bodies, otherwise referred to by the fashion industry as plus size bodies, sends a message to American women that so long as they are larger than the models they see in mass media, they do not matter. However, the fashion industry's opinion is not the only opinion that matters. Through their demand of visibility, body positive advocates display the value of women above a size 14.

Introduction to Models and Body Positive Activists Graham and Holliday:

Ashley Graham and Tess Holliday are models and body positive activists who empower their audiences by posting inspirational messages about beauty, body acceptance, and self-love through access to media platforms, such as their personal social media profiles. On Instagram, Graham frequently posts images and videos of her body, including visible "imperfections" such as cellulite, captioned with messages that resist the notion of “imperfections” being undesirable and instead encourage admiration of such features. In 2015, Graham presented a TEDx Talk called “Plus-size? More Like My Size,” in which she discusses the importance of, and encourages, self-acceptance and body diversity (Graham, 2015). In 2017, Graham published her first book, called *A New Model: What Confidence, Beauty, and Power Really Look Like*, in which she describes her career within the fashion industry, explains her own insecurities, and discusses her own path to self-acceptance and self-love; in the process, she attempts to encourage her readers to find self-confidence, self-acceptance, and self-love (A New Model, n.d.). Holliday, too, actively communicates body-positive messages through the platforms she uses. In 2013, Holliday started a body positive movement using the hashtag #effyourbeautystandards, with an objective “to empower people from all walks of life to embrace the body they are in right now,”(About, n.d.). As of 2019, the #effyourbeautystandards movement has prospered, with over 421,000 Instagram users following the account (Effyourbeautystandards, n.d.). On her personal Instagram page, Holliday posts images, videos, and art, which are nearly unanimously captioned with messages encouraging audiences to alter the ways they, and society, view and value bigger-sized bodies and their capabilities (Holliday, n.d.). In 2017, Holliday published her first book, called *The Not So Subtle Art of Being a Fat Girl,* in which she shares her personal story, explains the importance of loving our own imperfections, and encourages being comfortable in, and loving, your own body and skin (The Not So Subtle Art of Being a Fat Girl, n.d.). As activists, Graham and Holliday attempt to reframe their audiences’ interpretations and perceptions of plus-size bodies and natural bodily features, like cellulite, from being unattractive, unhealthy, and undesirable to being beautiful, worthy of love, and having unlimited capabilities.

In addition to being involved in activism, Graham and Holliday have made history within the fashion industry; Graham is the first size 14 model featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and American *Vogue* (Toma, 2017), and Holliday is the largest plus-size model signed to a major modeling agency (Gabel, 2015). Graham and Holliday's positions and visibility, in both the fashion industry and body positivity movement, make them useful "test cases" for exploring the complex relationship between the fashion industry and the body positivity subculture. As fashion models, Graham and Holliday are representatives for the fashion designers and brands that hire them. Those designers and brands pay Graham and Holliday to market the concept of body positivity, but do so in a way intended to sell products and generate profits.

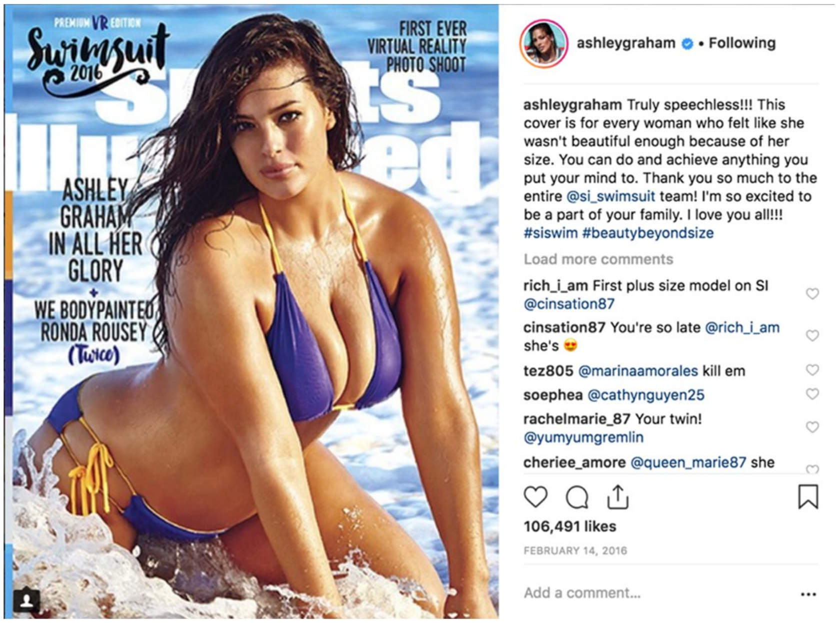
While Graham and Holliday's fashion magazine covers can be read as co-optation and commodification of body positivity, to benefit the fashion industry, it is also not so simple. Because Graham and Holliday have done things like collaborate with brands for clothing line partnerships, fashion catalogues, runway shows, and advertising campaigns, the activists are helping generate profits for brands and designers who might have historically, and potentially even currently, discriminated against members of the body-positive community. At the same time, though, Graham and Holliday are choosing to include themselves in spaces that have been culturally oppressive of people of their gender and size (i.e. the fashion industry). They use their visibility to reclaim those spaces, in order to encourage audiences who see their bodies in public spaces to understand the value and beauty of their bodies. Both Graham and Holliday repost photographs of their magazine covers on their personal Instagram profiles, encoding additional meanings onto their magazine cover's messages through Instagram captions. In the process of collaborating with brands inside the fashion industry, they have the opportunity to add additional, cultural meaning about the visibility of their bodies, which could empower women to accept and love their bodies as they are. I acknowledge being visible in spaces that have historically been culturally oppressive does not automatically make those spaces safe or better. Visibility is not simple; being seen in places like magazines can still result in negative consequences. Some plus-size members of the body positive subculture might think visibility in the fashion industry is not necessary for cultural progress; however, other plus-size members of the subculture, including Graham and Holliday, might believe it is. Additionally, I also acknowledge the important role that money plays with commodification and visibility. In a commodified, capitalistic culture, money is power. By being paid for their visibility and work, Graham and Holliday are afforded power enabling them to devote more of their time and energy to body positive activism. The dynamic between participating, and not participating, in demanding visibility in spaces known for being culturally submissive is nuanced, extremely complex, and beyond the scope of this study.

Analysis of Ashley Graham:

Ashley Graham is a fashion model and body positive activist from Nebraska who began her modeling career at 12-years-old. After modeling for catalogues and advertisements for a few years, Graham moved to New York City to pursue her modeling career, where she primarily modeled clothing and lingerie in advertisements and catalogues. In 2015, Graham made history by being the first plus size model to be featured in an advertisement within *Sports Illustrated* (*SI)'s* Swimsuit Issue magazine, a brand known for annually featuring fashion models on its Swimsuit Issue covers (Putnam, 2015). The following year, she made history once again by being the first plus size model on the cover of the magazine (Toma, 2017). Interestingly, in 2016, *SI* released three different Swimsuit Issue magazine covers, each featuring a different cover model: Ashley Graham, Ronda Rousey, and Hailey Clauson. In this chapter of my thesis, I will only focus on a deep read of Graham's cover. In response to the cover, both Graham and *SI* received criticism and praise. While some people, like former *SI* Swimsuit Issue cover model Cheryl Tiegs, criticized the brand for putting a plus-size model on the cover (Bacardi, 2016), others, like many commenters on Graham's Instagram post, were excited to see a plus size woman being represented on the cover of the magazine (Graham, 2016). While *SI*'s cover can be read as an attempt to generate profits for the company, Graham mitigates the commodification in her Instagram repost of the cover, in an attempt to inspire and empower her Instagram followers to think and feel differently about themselves and their worth.

Putting Graham on the cover of their Swimsuit Issue opened the door for *Sports Illustrated* to sell to a new market of consumers: the body positive community. The cover (as seen below) features Graham, a US size 14 model, dressed in a dark purple and yellow-gold string bikini. Graham is posed awkwardly on her hands and knees; she leans forward in a sexually-appealing angle, which elongates her upper body and draws emphasis to her large breasts. She is on the beach at a spot where the ocean water is sneaking up onto the sand. A small wave of clear water has just hit the lower left side of her body. The clear ocean water covers the majority of the space occupied by Graham's left thigh, and about half of the space of her right thigh, in the photograph's frame. Graham's flat stomach is visible, located in the middle-ground of the photograph, although it is hidden behind her arms. Graham does not have any visible fat rolls, stretch marks, or cellulite. She also does not have a double chin. The invisibility of such features, which are commonly seen on plus size bodies, could send a message to viewers that not having visible fat rolls, stretch marks, cellulite, or a double chin is equated with being attractive and worthy enough to be on the cover of *SI*'s annual Swimsuit Issue magazine. All in all, the *SI* photograph of Graham is constructed in a way that shrinks her plus size body into a body that takes up less physical space.

Rather than celebrating Graham's body and her size as is, the brand shrinks and hides her body; hence, *Sports Illustrated* sells a false narrative of body positivity. Graham is used both literally and symbolically as a cover for *SI*. The brand is not actually progressing into one promoting acceptance and love for bodies that do not fit within contemporary, narrow, restrictive cultural beauty standards. If it were progressing, the cover would not be encoded with symbols to shrink Graham's body to make her appear to fit within cultural standards of beauty, which happen to value thinness. Instead, *SI* seems to pretend to reform by using Graham as a spokesperson to reach body positive audiences and show *SI* welcomes models of diverse sizes. It is unclear to what extent Graham had control over the way her body was positioned and sold by *SI*'s cover; she revealed in an interview with Steve Harvey that she had control over the way her body parts were posed on the cover of American *Vogue* in 2017, telling Harvey, "I was posing the exact way I wanted to pose. I didn't want to look like the girls next to me. Liu Wen had her arm up. Kendall [Jenner] had her arm up. I said, 'Well, I'm not going to do what they do. I'm putting my arm down,'" (Pham, 2017). Whether or not she had control over the ways her body was positioned and sold by *SI,* Graham did have control, as an activist, in deciding whether or not to accept the job as a model for the magazine**.** She chose to be represented. In doing so, she made a statement that curves should be visible in cultural media. If she believes her body deserves visibility, and she gets such visibility through taking a job as a model for *SI,* then other marginalized bodies within the body positive community deserve visibility, too.



ashleygraham Truly speechless!!! This cover is for every woman who felt like she wasn't beautiful enough because of her size. You can do and achieve anything you put your mind to. Thank you so much to the entire @si_swimsuit team! I'm so excited to be a part of your family. I love you all!!! #siswim #beautybeyondsize

rich_i_am First plus size model on SI @cinsation87

cinsation87 You're so late @rich_i_am she's 😍

tez805 @marinaamorales kill em

soephea @cathynguyen25

rachelmarie_87 Your twin! @yumyumgremlin

cheriee_amore @queen_marie87 she

106,491 likes

FEBRUARY 14, 2016

Figure 1: Graham’s Instagram post, February 14, 2016. (Graham, 2016)

On February 14, 2016, Graham reposted a photograph of *SI*’s cover onto her Instagram profile to promote the magazine cover to her followers. When she reposted the photograph, she added a caption, which encoded additional symbols into the message for readers to decode. The additional symbols have the power to change the way the message is interpreted by audiences. Graham writes in her caption, “This cover is for every woman who felt like she wasn’t beautiful enough because of her size” (Figure 1). Here, Graham tells her audience women are beautiful no matter their size. Thus, she is saying beauty is not measured by body size or proportions. An interpretation of *SI*’s message does not mirror Graham’s, unfortunately. By shrinking and hiding Graham’s body, the magazine is telling audiences beauty is influenced by the space one’s body takes up; whereas in her caption, Graham resists *SI*’s message that beauty is equated with size. Instead of reinforcing *SI*’s message, Graham encourages viewers to understand they are beautiful, and they can “do and achieve anything you put your mind to” no matter one’s size (Graham, 2016). Graham dedicates her cover to women who felt like they weren’t beautiful enough because of their size, and in doing so, dedicates the cover to women within the body positive community. Women within the body positive community have been under- and mis-represented in popular culture, but Graham's cover is a symbol of hope for the body positive community. Graham's body is now visible in popular culture media. Her body represents other bodies within the body positive community, specifically plus size bodies.

Even if the existence of body positive visibility in American popular culture is a gateway to body positive empowerment, it is still very complicated. Sarah Banet-Weiser explains in her book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny,* "the politics of visibility has…long been important for the marginalized, and continues to be. To demand visibility is to demand to be seen, to matter, to recognize oneself in dominant culture" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 22). Body positive activists, like Graham, are demanding to be seen, even if it means not having control over how one's body is used to construct a message. Of course, this can go wrong, as discussed by scholars of the visibility of minorities in media, who find evidence, for example, "that media frequently depict racial minorities and women in demeaning and unflattering ways," (Paek and Shah, 2003, p. 226). Depicting racial (or body size) minorities in a condescending way is dangerous because audiences might accept those portrayals of minority groups, and as a result, develop a distorted image of members of that minority group (Paek and Shah, 2003). Although Graham might believe demanding visibility is a progressive decision for herself and the body positive community, the overall results from her visibility are complicated. On the one hand, it is progressive to see size-diversity in American media. The visibility of body positivity, as seen through Graham's existence on *SI*'s cover, can result in emancipation from the damages caused by restrictive beauty ideals. The visibility of her body can make a statement: her body exists, is beautiful, deserves love, and matters. If Graham's body exists, is beautiful, deserves love, and matters, then other bodies within the body positive community do, too. On the other hand, the visibility of size-diverse women in American media also has negative implications. Visibility of plus size bodies in media is scarce, and when there are representations of plus size bodies like Graham's *SI* cover, the bodies are posed in a way make plus size bodies seem smaller, and therefore closer to the contemporary cultural beauty ideal of thinness.

Analysis of Tess Holliday:

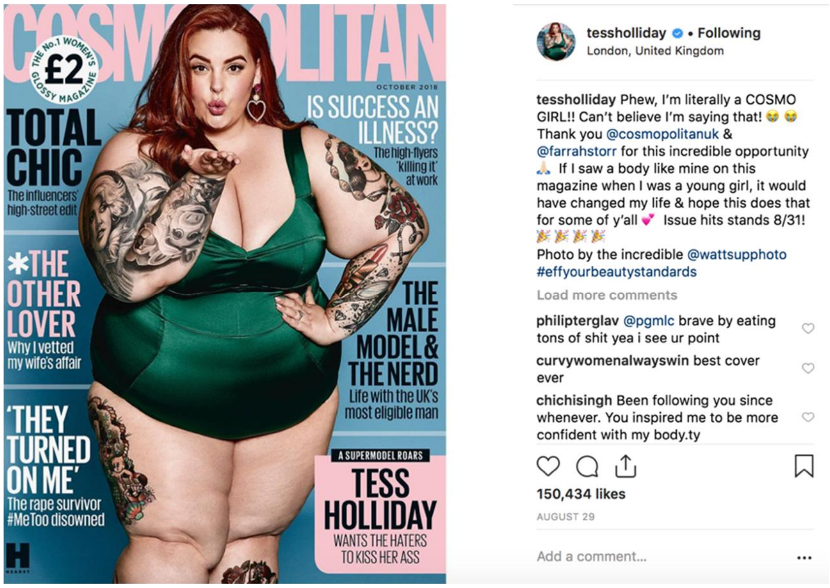
Tess Holliday is a fashion model and body positive activist from Mississippi who made history in 2015 by being the first plus size model over a size 20 to be signed to a major modeling agency (About, n.d.). Holliday began her modeling career in 2010 for independent designers and brands. In 2013, she started an Instagram body positive campaign called #effyourbeautystandards, which later developed into an Instagram account called @effyourbeautystandards (About, n.d.). According to Jessica Cwynar-Horta, in her paper on the commodification of body positivity on Instagram, Holliday created the body positive campaign as "a call to all women to love their bodies and show the world that they can be sexy and fashionable too" (Cwynar-Horta 2016, p. 38). Holliday actively contributes to her body positive Instagram campaign, on both her personal Instagram (@tessholliday) and her campaign's Instagram (@effyourbeautystandards) in an attempt to encourage individuals to embrace and love their bodies as they are, and disregard cultural beauty standards that marginalize their bodies.

As mentioned earlier, plus size models in the top modeling agencies typically range between a US size 10 to 14. Holliday, in contrast, is over a size 20. Holliday's size likely limits her marketability as a fashion model because of contemporary American culture's bias against fat bodies. Amanda Czerniawski explains, in her essay about plus size fashion models, "the basic definition of ‘plus-size’ in modeling does not match the cultural image of a fat women” (Czerniawski, 2012, p. 128). For instance, a model who wears a size 14, like Graham, does not match the cultural image of a fat woman. Regardless, she is labeled “plus size” and hired to model clothes as a representation for plus size women. Scholars Giovanelli and Ostertag explain in “Controlling the Body: Media Representations, Body Size and Self-Discipline,” by paying attention to “*how often* social groups are represented in the media” and “*how* [social groups] *are portrayed* when represented,” audiences can decipher implied messages about social groups, like plus size bodies (Giovanelli and Ostertag, 2009, p. 291). Models like Holliday are less visible in American popular culture and mass media, perhaps because women beyond an American size 14/16 fit within cultural ideas of fat bodies, but not cultural ideas of plus size fashion models. Whereas Graham’s body (which, as a reminder, is an American size 14) is visible on many magazines' covers, Holliday’s (which is above an American size 20) remains unseen for the most part. If Holliday’s body were to remain invisible, then it would send the message that her body— and bodies like hers— are not considered as effective at selling products as smaller models to the American fashion industry. However, Holliday has been on the cover of fashion magazines, and the face of numerous brands’ clothing lines. In addition, Holliday partnered with fashion brands to help create clothing lines. Holliday’s body is visible, and like Graham, her visibility is credited in part due to the fashion industry’s commodification of body positivity.

In August 2018, United Kingdom’s *Cosmopolitan* (*Cosmo* UK) announced plus size fashion model Tess Holliday was their cover model for their October 2018 issue. The magazine cover features Holliday wearing an emerald green one-piece swimsuit. Unlike Graham’s *Sports Illustrated* cover, Holliday stands in front of a solid, light blue background, which can be decoded as an attempt to show her entire body, rather than shrink or hide it. Holliday stands with her left leg propped slightly in front of her right one; viewers can see the bumpy outline of her outer thighs. The visibility of the bumps on her thighs implies her body has not been digitally retouched; her skin has not been smoothed to make her appear smaller. Holliday's arm and leg tattoos are visible; viewers can see an array of tattoos, including one of Miss Piggy, a Muppet character and cultural icon. Holliday stands up straight and tall, with one hand placed on her hip and the other held open, with a palm up facing up, located just a few inches below her pursed lips, to represent Tess blowing a kiss to the camera. A small section of Holliday's breasts are hidden behind her left arm and hand as a result of Holliday's blown kiss. On the bottom right of the cover, a short caption reads, "Tess Holliday wants the haters to kiss her ass" (Holliday, 2018). The caption can be deciphered as a message symbolizing how Holliday does not care what other people, especially haters, think about her body.

Cosmo UK's October 2018 magazine cover commodifies body positivity by marketing to the body positive audience as a new target consumer. The magazine uses the idea of female empowerment and confidence to attract reader attention and sell magazines. *Cosmopolitan*, as a brand, creates international fashion magazines and generates most of its revenue through advertising. To keep running as a company, *Cosmopolitan* must continue to publish a significant amount of advertisements. More often than not, the magazine's advertisements are for the beauty and diet industries, which then shape the fashion industry, and all together shape the cultural landscape of beauty standards. *Cosmo* UK's main concern, like *SI*'s, is to generate profits. Traditional beauty standards continue to be overwhelmingly profitable, as advertisers play on consumers' desire to meet those standards, through the purchase of new products. However, *Cosmo* UK can potentially generate additional profits by targeting a new group of consumers through commodifying body positivity to monetize the social movement. As an activist, Holliday can choose to participate, or choose not to participate, in *Cosmo*'s commodification. Holliday willingly accepted the offer of being a cover model. Based on Holliday's prior activism, and on the quote that accompanies the image (see Figure 2), it is safe to assume that Holliday did so to make a political statement: bodies over a US size 20 are beautiful and worthy of love, acceptance, and empowerment. Bodies above a size 20 matter. Additionally, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter while introducing Graham and Holliday as activists and models, Holliday was likely paid well for the cover, which gives her more monetary power to continue to support her activist messages and movement.

As Banet-Weiser explains, "visibility itself is a route to politics" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 140). Representation, once again, is not so simple. First, I must reiterate, for some members of the body positive community, being on the cover of a culturally valued magazine like *Cosmopolitan* is a ground-breaking achievement, especially for a model who represents a marginalized group of people, such as the body positive community. Seeking visibility inside the commodity culture could be seen as a path to liberation and self-love, but it is *not* the only path.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Why I vetted my wife's affair
THE MALE MODEL & THE NERD
Life with the UK's most eligible man
'THEY TURNED ON ME'
The rape survivor #MeToo disowned
A SUPERMODEL ROARS
TESS HOLLIDAY
WANTS THE HATERS TO KISS HER ASS
H

tessholliday • Following
London, United Kingdom

tessholliday Phew, I'm literally a COSMO GIRL!! Can't believe I'm saying that! 😭 😭 Thank you @cosmopolitanuk & @farrahstorr for this incredible opportunity 🙏 If I saw a body like mine on this magazine when I was a young girl, it would have changed my life & hope this does that for some of y'all 💕 Issue hits stands 8/31! 🎉🎉🎉🎉
Photo by the incredible @wattsupphoto #effyourbeautystandards

Load more comments

philipterglav @pgmlc brave by eating tons of shit yea i see ur point

curvywomenalwayswin best cover ever

chichisingh Been following you since whenever. You inspired me to be more confident with my body.ty

150,434 likes
AUGUST 29

Add a comment...

Figure 2: Holliday's Instagram post, August 29, 2018. (Holliday, 2018)

By accepting the duties of a *Cosmo* cover girl, Holliday is demanding Western culture pay attention to her. Holliday, like Graham, reposted a photograph of her *Cosmo* UK cover onto her Instagram profile and added a caption. In doing so, Holliday added to the overall message of the *Cosmo* UK cover, which could alter the ways Instagram users interpret *Cosmo* UK's magazine cover, depending on their perspective. In her caption, as seen in the screenshot above, Holliday writes, "If I saw a body like mine on this magazine when I was a young girl, it would have changed my life & hope this does that for some of y'all," (Figure 2). She suggests seeing a body-positive woman over a size 20 in a swimsuit, on the cover of a fashion magazine, would have "changed her life," and the ways she viewed, felt about, and valued herself, and about the beauty and fashion industries. As a body positive activist, Holliday encourages individuals to accept and love themselves for who they are. However, the representation of her plus size body as a symbol of body positivity on the cover of a fashion magazine is not simple.

Beyond making money for *Cosmo* UK and for herself, Holliday is also attempting to change the way people view and understand bodies and beauty. She states in her Instagram caption (see figure 2) that she hopes individuals who see her Instagram post are changed because of *Cosmo* UK's cover, implying this change will affect their mindset. Holliday's body does not conform to cultural standards of beauty. Seemingly, the cover image was not altered or distorted, as evinced by her noticeable "imperfections," like cellulite, which are usually brushed out of digitally-altered images, on the magazine's cover. Holliday, then, is communicating to her audience that one does not have to conform to cultural beauty norms to be thought of as beautiful. To summarize, by reposting *Cosmo* UK's magazine cover onto her Instagram profile (see figure 2), Holliday encourages her Instagram followers to understand her body is beautiful as it is, and therefore all bodies are beautiful as they are. Holliday, thus, is encouraging her followers to buy the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, but also to adopt a body positive mindset and feel empowered to love themselves in the skin they are in.

Conclusion:

In that the mainstream media, and the fashion industry more specifically, the visibility of plus size bodies, as representatives of the body positive subculture, is complicated, but also encouraging. Although fashion models like Graham and Holliday collaborate with brands within the fashion industry on jobs that potentially commodify body positivity, they seemingly do so with the intention of demanding visibility in popular culture. Through their newfound visibility, the body positive fashion models attempt to encourage women to adopt a body positive mindset and resist feeling badly about not fitting within narrow cultural beauty standards. Jessica Cwynar-Horta addresses issues body positive advocates have with the commodification of body positivity in her essay, “The Commodification of the Body Positive Movement on Instagram.” She explains some body positive advocates, like Marie Denee, argue body positivity’s commodification “changed the structure and goals of the [social] movement” from an inclusive movement designed to “address unrealistic ideals about beauty, promote self-acceptance, and build self-esteem through improving one’s self-image and learning to love oneself to the fullest” to one that “now represents conventionally attractive, thin white women who are being positive about their bodies” (quoted in Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 40). Marie Denee’s argument is valid, as the fashion industry often constructs messages about body positivity filled with signs and symbols reinforcing culturally-set, narrow beauty ideals. However, Denee’s argument overlooks the benefits of empowerment, resulting from body positive visibility in popular culture.

As explained earlier, in a media context, visibility equates to worth. The visibility of body positive activists, such as Graham and Holliday, opens the door for conversations about cultural issues. When activists are visible, audiences are able to listen to what the activists are saying. When people listen, activists can encourage listeners to show resistance against the values of culturally created beauty standards, and in doing so, change the way people within American culture think of and value bodies, especially bodies that have been invisible or oppressed by American culture.

Chapter Two

The Complexities of "Body Positive" Visibility in Netflix's *Insatiable* and *Dumplin'*

Introduction:

Insatiable and *Dumplin'* are coming of age stories following the lives of two teenage girls from small, southern towns, who compete in beauty pageants with different motives for revenge. Netflix sparked controversy in July 2018 when a trailer for *Insatiable* was first released. *Insatiable*'s main character, Patty Bladell (played by Debby Ryan), is inspired to enter her local beauty pageant with the goal of seeking personal revenge on everyone who she feels has bullied or belittled her. Audiences and critics around the globe had mixed reactions about the premise of the twelve-episode season; while some were intrigued by the show's supposed comedic plot and anticipated its August release date, others were convinced the show would send a dangerous message about health and body image, by promoting fatphobia and romanticizing the idea of thinness being synonymous with attractiveness. As a result, over 200,000 online users petitioned for the show to be canceled (Given, 2018). Despite the petition, *Insatiable* was released as scheduled on August 10, 2018. A few months later, Netflix released a trailer for its original film *Dumplin',* based on Julie Murphy's 2015 best-selling novel. *Dumplin'*'s main character, Willowdean (Will) Dickson (played by Danielle Macdonald), is inspired to enter her town's local beauty pageant as an act of protest against the oppressive culture of beauty pageants. Netflix received a much more positive response to *Dumplin''s* trailer.

Beauty pageants may be central to the storylines for both *Insatiable* and *Dumplin'*, but the shows send opposing messages about reactions to cultural discrimination against fat bodies, especially in regards to the beauty pageant industry. Although the storylines might sound similar, they are constructed with two very different tones, resulting in the majority of critics and public audiences praising *Dumplin'* for its inspiring takeaways and criticizing *Insatiable* for its unwillingness to acknowledge the discursive power of fat imagery and tropes. In this chapter, building on fat and minority representation scholarship, the complexities of body positive representations in media are analyzed through a textual and discourse analysis. While the storyline and tone of *Dumplin'* acknowledges and promotes the beauty in diverse-sized women (including plus size women), *Insatiable*'s positive-intentions and tone fall short, leaving itself open to being interpreted as a show that ignored the symbolic power of fat suits and mis-used satire. As a result, many audiences and critics are left thinking *Insatiable* promotes an unhealthy body image and lifestyle.

Method:

I use discourse and textual analysis to examine the influence and significance of language in Netflix's *Insatiable* and *Dumplin'*, in addition to public and critical audience responses to those media forms. For the sake of this chapter, the most important use of language is to create meaning. Discourse analysis "explores how texts are *made* meaningful…and also how they contribute to the constitution of social reality by *making* meaning," (Phillips & Hardy, 2011, p. 4). Texts, in this case, can be written or spoken language, pictures, symbols, or any other form of communication. Throughout this chapter, I will take a closer look at word choices used by creators and viewers of Netflix's *Insatiable* and *Dumplin'* to emphasize the power in language and expose the ways that the discourse in *Insatiable* and *Dumplin'*, and their audience responses, do, or do not, align with body positive discourse. To better understand the influence texts have on audiences, one should first understand discourse analysis' background. According to broadcast journalism scholar Dina Ibrahim, discourse analysis:

> is rooted in semiology, the study of how meanings are generated in media texts. Semiotic approaches to media content evaluate the encoded messages of [producers] who

> generated the texts, which reveals their ideological assumptions. It is a study of how meaning is constructed, and how the functions of those meanings are signified (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 115).

In other words, discourse analysis examines the denotations, or meanings, assigned to texts by members of a culture. The ways those meanings are used in the public domain, i.e. in media forms like television shows and movies, are not necessarily interpreted in the same ways by all audiences. Ibrahim explains that messages communicated through television can be "presented with particularly preferred meanings which reflect the ideology of the dominant class in society," but audience members can interpret the messages differently (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 115).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, cultural theorist Stuart Hall developed the encoding and decoding model in 1973 to explain media messages generate meaning both when the media is produced and consumed. In this model, Hall expresses the value of paying attention to how each media consumer interprets and understands signs, symbols, and language, because different perspectives and cultural lenses influence the ways individuals understand representations in media (Hall, 1973). Since, according to Hall, there is room for meaning to be negotiated, media producers might intend for viewers to take away specific messages, but said viewers might take away dissimilar messages depending on their understandings of texts and language. Though I acknowledge the potential for multiple responses to both programs, this chapter focuses on how fat imagery has a discursive power that the body positive movement needs to acknowledge, even as it challenges it.

Representations of Fat Bodies in Media & Fat/Weight Stigmatization:

Thus far, there is no research investigating body positive representations in media. Body positivity is fairly new, which explains why few scholarly discussions about the subculture and movement exist. However, scholarship exploring the representations of fat people in media, including television shows and movies, has been conducted. In their 2007 study on fat stigmatization, or “the glorification of the thin ideal,” and the “devaluing of an individual due to excess body weight,” psychology scholars Susan Himes and J. Kevin Thompson explain that fat stigmatization is caused by many factors, which include negative cultural associations between body fat and laziness, as well as the “belief that weight can be controlled with self-regulation,” (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 712). Previous research on fat stigmatization indicates “overweight and obese children, adolescents, and adults are often negatively stereotyped, treated differently, and face discrimination,” in both media representations and their daily lives (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 712). Himes and Thompson disclose two forms of fat stigmatization, which can be found in entertainment media: commentary and humor (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 712). In some cases, like in the movie *The Nutty Professor*, fat stigmatization is conveyed within commentary “to make a statement about the weight of the overweight character”; in other cases, it is conveyed within fat jokes (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 712). Similarly, Himes and Thompson disclose two distinct ways that media promotes the thin ideal: “First, attractive images of successful, thin women are promoted as ideals to be imitated or copied. Second, images or characterizations of overweight and obese characters are stigmatized, further reinforcing the thin ideal,” (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 712). Messages that stigmatize fat bodies cause negative outcomes, effecting both people’s health and their understandings of fatness.

Psychology scholars Rebecca L. Pearl, Rebecca M. Puhl, and Kelly D. Brownell explain in their 2012 article, “Positive Media Portrayals of Obese Persons: Impact on Attitudes and Image Preferences,” people who experience weight stigmatization are at higher risk for psychological problems, physical complications, and disordered eating, which “[challenges] the popular belief that weight bias motivates individuals to lose weight and become healthy,” (Pearl, Puhl, & Brownell, 2012, p. 821). In addition to explaining the negative effects of weight stigmatization in media, Pearl, Puhl, and Brownell explain that a 2011 study, conducted by McClure, Puhl, and Heuer found, “exposure to negative portrayals of obese persons in the media contributes to biased attitudes,” resulting in people expressing “stronger antifat attitudes,” (Pearl, Puhl, & Brownell, 2012, p. 822). Therefore, research shows media exposure *does* impact the ways people understand and judge others based on body size.

In their research, Himes and Thompson conducted a content analysis of numerous television shows and movies, and found, “fat comments made about the self were much less common than those about or directed to another person,” and, “male characters were three times more likely to engage in fat commentary than female characters,” (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 716). To sum, their findings expose both a gender divide and a tendency for people to judge and comment on others’ bodies. Unlike Himes and Thompson, Pearl, Puhl, and Brownell conducted an online study, with a sample of 146 participants, to explore the effects of exposure to stigmatizing versus positive portrayals of “obese” persons in the media. The results of their research revealed participants who were shown to positive images of fat bodies “reported less desire for social distance from the obese model than participants who viewed the stigmatizing images,” and participants were “also less likely to endorse negative attitudes toward obese persons in direct response to positive images,” (Pearl, Puhl, & Brownell, 2012, p. 825). Thus, their research findings suggest media has the power to stop fat stigmatization and, in its place, circulate texts that accept and empower, rather than degrade and shame, fat bodies.

Minority Representation and Demanding Visibility:

As described in my literature review, media representations are defined as an attempt to create “shared cultural meaning” and [normalize] specific world-views or ideologies” (Fürsich, 2010, p. 115). Usually, minorities are constructed by people who identify with dominant social groups inside a culture (Paek and Shah, 2003), who are involved in the process of creating and "sustaining social and political inequalities (Fürsich, 2010, p. 115). Because the portrayals of minorities, for instance Asian Americans, are not constructed by those who identify as Asian American, scholars have found media "[perpetuates inaccurate, restrictive] stereotypes," (Paek and Shah, 2003, p. 240). Since minorities do not have the accessibility to control their portrayals in media, audiences are unable to see conflicting portrayals of such minority identities and therefore are inclined to believe the narrow, stereotyped portrayals they see of oppressed social groups are accurate, when in fact, they are not (Paek and Shah, 2003). If audiences accept the belittling portrayals of minority groups they see in media, then they may develop a distorted image of minority groups (Paek and Shah, 2003). For these reasons, it is imperative for minority groups to demand visibility and fight back against the inaccurate portrayals of their social groups in media.

Sarah Banet-Weiser explains in her book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny,* "the politics of visibility has…long been important for the marginalized, and continues to be. To demand visibility is to demand to be seen, to matter, to recognize oneself in dominant culture," (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 22). Others, like Nathaniel Frank, explore the politics of visibility and argue, "'the notion [of] increasing familiarity with marginalized groups is key to expanding respect for their rights,'" (quoted in Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 22). Banet-Weiser elaborates, "the insistence of marginalized and disenfranchised communities…to be *seen* has been crucial to an understanding and an expansion of rights for these communities," (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 22). In other words, although marginalized groups have been historically oppressed and misrepresented in media, they must demand opportunities to improve the accuracy of their visibility in media. By doing so, the portrayals of minorities will become less belittling and media audiences will obtain more complete, accurate understandings of minority groups and the depth of their identities, beyond mere cultural stereotypes.

Background:

Insatiable is a twelve-episode “dark humored” (Dodson, 2018) and “satirical comedy” (Miller, 2018), created by Lauren Gussis, an eating disorder survivor (Gussis, 2018b), to tell the revenge story of Patty Bladell, a plus size, bullied teenager from Georgia. Gussis explains she created the show’s lead character, Patty, based on “the inner demon of my formerly bullied teenage [self],” who spent years “feeling really bullied and marginalized,” and turning her character’s storyline into “a cautionary tale about what it means to enact revenge as opposed to actually working on yourself” (Romero, 2018). In other words, she envisioned the portrayal of Patty’s life as a way to warn the show’s audience what could happen if people valued each other solely on outside appearance, rather than also factoring in internal aspects of one’s identity. In the show, Patty lives with her thin mother, Angie. Unlike Angie, who was confident and wanted to become a beauty queen as a teenager, Patty has hated her body for as long as she can remember. One day, she gets involved in a physical fight with a homeless man. After he punches her, Patty suffers a jaw injury, requiring her mouth to be wired shut for three months and forcing her to go on a liquid diet resulting in (an unrealistic) weight loss of 70 pounds. As a result of her weight loss and newfound thinness, Patty’s identity is completely reinvented. After discovering her weight loss, Bob Armstrong, Patty’s pro-bono attorney, encourages Patty to enter local beauty pageants, and volunteers himself to be her coach. *Insatiable* tells the story of how Patty navigates through life post-weight loss and pursues beauty pageants, all the while seeking personal revenge on everyone who she perceives treated her badly.

Dumplin' is Anne Fletcher's movie adaptation based on "fat feminist" (Murphy, n.d.) author Julie Murphy's 2015 best-selling novel of the same title. The movie follows the life of plus size Willowdean (Will) Dickson, referred to as Dumplin' by her single, thin mother Rosie Dickson. Rosie happens to be the former Miss 1991 Teen Bluebonnet Pageant winner and a current pageant committee member who is deeply engrossed in the culture of beauty pageants. Will, however, expresses no interest in the beauty pageant industry; instead, her passions are inspired by her Aunt Lucy, Rosie's plus size sister, who taught Will nearly everything, from manners, to the brilliance of Dolly Parton, to body image development. Will expresses a deep love for Dolly Parton early on in her life, and shares that love with her Aunt Lucy and her best friend, Ellen. After Aunt Lucy passes away, Will finds her late aunt's pageant application form from 1993. She feels inspired to enter the local beauty pageant in honor of her aunt, to protest the cultural beauty norms that held her aunt Lucy back from entering the pageant over two decades prior. *Dumplin'* follows Will's journey to the eighty-fifth Miss Teen Bluebonnet Pageant, and illustrates her emotional growth throughout the process.

***Insatiable*'s Construction of a Fat Identity, and Use of a Fat Suit:**

In the first minute of *Insatiable*'s first episode, Patty introduces herself to the show's audience and explains she has never had a healthy relationship with food or her body. Patty narrates to the show's audience that she, "spent her entire adolescence hating her body," while simultaneously being "the target of bullying and cruel jokes," (Gussis, 2018a). It only takes the show *one minute* to address the reason for Patty's self-hatred and bullying: her fatness. Thirty-three seconds into *Insatiable*'s first episode, eight-year-old Patty is being weighed on a scale in an open room full of women of all ages, shapes, and sizes. A woman, who appears to represent a nutritionist, stands next to young Patty and shakes her head disapprovingly at the sight of Patty's weight on the scale. The head shake suggests Patty weighs more than she should, according to the nutritionist. It is implied Patty should lose weight for the woman to approve of her weight. So, Patty begins to diet.

The next frame jumps in time to show Patty as a 17-year-old girl, unhappily looking at her body in her nearly full-length bedroom mirror. Patty is visibly larger and rounder, described by feminist writer Roxanne Gay in her analysis of the show, as appearing "'television fat,'" meaning Patty:

> is only as fat as the show's creator can imagine a young woman being without completely horrifying audience sensibilities. Patty is… probably a size 18/20. The actress who plays her, Debby Ryan, wears a chin prosthetic and a lumpy stomach pillow, but it's not at all convincing. She looks like a thin woman in a fat suit, and it's grating that the show didn't even try to make Patty a convincing fat girl. (Gay, 2018)

Gay brings up an interesting point related to minority representations. She argues Patty's construction as a fat teenager is filtered through the lens of what might seem like the image of fatness to a thin person. In all likelihood, if a fat person constructed the image of Patty's fat identity, the actress playing Patty would be a fat actress, not a thin actress in a fat suit.

Women and gender studies scholars have exposed the condescending meanings behind fat suits on numerous occasions. Scholar Amy Gullage explains in her 2014 essay "Fat Monica, Fat Suits, and *Friends*," "fat suits are full-body costumes designed to imitate the contours, bulges, lumps, and size of a fat body," and along with wearing a fat suit, actors often wear, "a combination of latex pieces or full face masks and make-up in order to fatten up their faces, chins and necks," (Gullage, 2014, p. 179). *Insatiable*'s construction of Fatty Patty, as seen in Figure 3, fits Gullage's description of a fat suit perfectly.

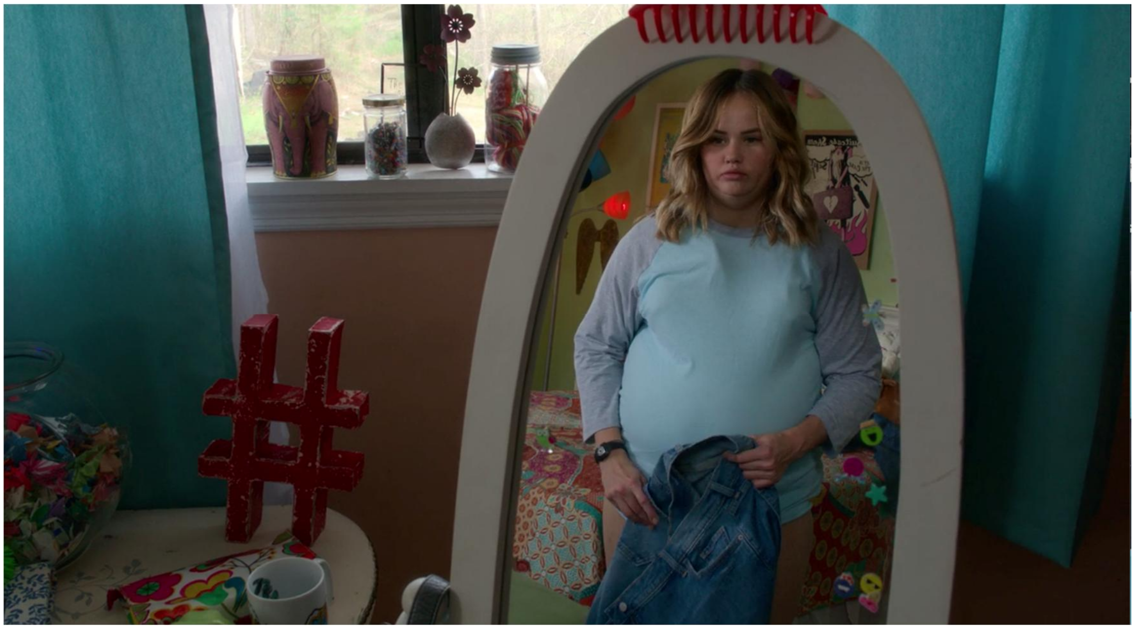

Figure 3: Actress Debby Ryan in a fat suit; Season 1, episode 1 of *Insatiable.* (Gussis, 2018a)

Some audience reactions to *Insatiable,* situated outside the academic discourse, have acknowledged the use of a fat suit is a form of fat shaming. After watching *Insatiable*'s trailer, Brittany Ross explains in her *Broadly* article, "'Insatiable' Is a Perfect Example of How to Get Body Positivity Totally Wrong," "no one involved with this show seems to understand that putting a thin actress in a fat suit and yielding to tired clichés about fat people IS shaming in and of itself," (Ross, 2018). Similarly, body positive, plus size fashion blogger Suma Jane Dark explained in a group interview with *Paper Magazine*, she:

> was kind of shocked to see a fat suit in 2018…. Culturally, we are beyond this particular narrative and the genre should be updated to reflect that. Let [Patty] stay fat. Cast a fat actress and ditch the fat suit. Let her go on a journey in a fat body. (Moen, 2018)

Members of the public associate the use of fat suits with body size discrimination. And, they are correct to.

Women's studies scholar Katharina R. Mendoza argues in her 2009 essay, fat suits are used to mock fat identities and highlight the normative discourse about fatness and weight loss

(Mendoza, 2009, p. 280). As seen in many movies and television shows, like in *Friends, Just Friends,* the *Big Momma* franchise, Tyler Perry's *Madea* franchise, and *Norbit,* "the simple fact of a character's size passes for comedy," (Mendoza, 2009, p. 281). Beyond comedy, fat suits are used in television shows and movies "to reinforce popular narratives about fatness…[depicting] dominant understandings that fat people are lazy, gluttonous, and unable to control their appetite," (Gullage, 2014, p. 179). Furthermore, fat suits are entangled in the discourse of weight shaming:

> By looking at how the fat suit is deployed in [a narrative]…, we can see how such films are just the manifestations of the 'inside every fat person is a thin person' trope so often found in weight loss discourse. (Mendoza, 2009, p. 281)

Mendoza elaborates, the use of fat suits is not necessarily "to create an authentic-looking fat person," but rather, to construct an "illusion of weight loss or weight gain…[stressing a] contingent… [relationship with] the presence of her corresponding thinner self," (Mendoza, 2009, p. 287). In television shows and movies that feature actors in fat suits, "the coexistent bodies [fat and thin] are presented as having an unequal relationship with each other in which the thin body, not surprisingly, dominates," (Mendoza, 2009, p. 281). To sum, fat suits further reinforce the thin-ideal, and romanticize the concept of weight loss.

Clearly, fat suits are degrading. Gussis, however, seems to be in denial about the symbolic significance of fat suits to the fat and body positive community. In an interview with Refinery29, she explains:

> [the fat suit] was always going to be used…. It felt important to me to say you are exactly the same person either way [, fat and thin]. We were very careful about who we chose to do the suit and how we portrayed it and trying to make it accurate. (Romero, 2018)

Gussis claims the show's creators were "careful" in their portrayal of Patty, trying to make her character seem "accurate." But, if she wanted Patty to seem like an accurate, fat teenager, then she should have hired a fat actress to play the role. Also, as Mendoza states in her 2009 article on fat suits, though, the point of fat suits is *not* to “create an authentic-looking fat person,” but instead to illustrate a weight loss or weight gain fantasy (Mendoza, 2009, p. 287). Gussis may not have intended to be malicious nor misrepresentative in her constructed representations of fatness; however, by using a fat suit in the show, *Insatiable*’s construction of ‘Fatty Patty’ reinforces oppressive, stereotypical tropes about fatness.

‘Fatty Patty’ loses weight, transforms into Patty:

Only a mere six minutes into *Insatiable*’s first episode, Patty sits alone on the ground outside a local convenience store. She is shown eating a chocolate bar as an emotional coping mechanism, after being rejected by Brick Armstrong, her crush, who laughed at Patty’s assumption he was romantically interested in her when he was nice to her earlier in the day. As Patty bites into her chocolate bar, a homeless man approaches her and sits to her right. He asks her if she has five dollars, and when Patty does not respond right away, he continues, “How ‘bout that candy bar? It’s not like you need it, Fatty,” (Gussis, 2018a). As the words leave the homeless character’s mouth, Patty punches him in the face. He then punches her back, and the screen becomes black. *Insatiable* fast forwards to three months later, when Patty has to attend a court hearing to defend her actions in the fight. Bob Armstrong—an attorney and pageant coach—takes on Patty’s case pro-bono at his father’s request. Bob asks his father, who doubles as his boss, when their law firm started doing pro-bono cases, to which Bob’s father replies, “Since nobody cares about fatties or homeless people!” (Gussis, 2018a). Once again, *Insatiable* is building the foundation of the fat identity. Linguistically, the show is positioning fat people in a similar way to homeless people, literally saying nobody cares about either group.

Bob advises Patty to settle for a guilty plea in her court hearing, which will result in probation and being labeled a convicted felon. Patty is on board with the guilty plea and is grateful for Bob's help. However, when Bob meets Patty in person for the first time, he notices Patty is no longer fat. Over the last three months, while her jaw was wired shut, Patty was on a liquid diet resulting in an impractical 70-pound weight loss. In response to her newfound thinness, Bob envisions Patty as a potential winner of the Miss USA beauty pageant, referring to Patty as a "diamond in the rough, a beauty queen just waiting to happen," (Gussis, 2018a). He quickly changes his mind from advising Patty to settle for a guilty plea to clearing her name from any charges, because, "pretty girls don't have to settle," and because beauty pageant contestants cannot be convicted of any felonies (Gussis, 2018a).

Whereas Gussis explains the show is ultimately building a case to argue it is damaging to judge people solely on the outside, physical traits, rather than the internal ones (Gussis, 2018b), viewers of the show interpret Patty's unhealthy path to weight loss and the shift in how others treat her, based on her newfound thinness, as another damaging misrepresentation of the fat identity. Fat activist and writer Tori Spainhour explains in a group interview with *Paper Magazine*, "this 'fat' girl [Patty] loses weight by being given an effective eating disorder. Her jaw is wired shut so she cannot eat. Which is CRAZY," (Moen, 2018). Plus size model Sheila Lopez adds to Spainhour's comment in the same group interview, saying she also interpreted the show as promoting an eating disorder:

> the message is basically "stop eating and you'll [lose] weight"!! that's so dangerous. I remember as a teenager dealing with an eating disorder. So many young women do, and this is not okay to send this message. (Moen, 2018)

Once again, the creator of *Insatiable*'s intended message of the series falls flat; although she might have intended to send a positive message through *Insatiable*, Gussis' show portrays the opposite message. Moreover, the differential treatment Patty receives before and after her speedy, unhealthy weight loss reinforces two different standards of treatment: if you are thin, you’re pretty and you can expect more out of relationships and opportunities in life (i.e., you are afforded opportunities for romantic relationships, you receive support to join beauty pageants); but, if you are fat, you should not set high expectations for your experiences in life. Essentially, *Insatiable* reinforces the idea that society discriminates against fat people, and everyone is aware of it, including viewers who watch *Insatiable* with a body-positive lens.

Insatiable’s **mis-use of satire as a form of social commentary:**

In response to the criticism *Insatiable* received after the release of the show’s trailer, members of the *Insatiable* cast defended the show and its premise by arguing the show is satirical, and therefore, should not be interpreted literally. Instead, the cast encouraged viewers to watch the show and realize *Insatiable* “aims to dissect the insidious pressures we place on young women” (Ryan, 2018). Actress Debby Ryan, who plays Patty, posted a statement to Twitter on July 21, 2018, explaining *Insatiable* is “a show that addresses and confronts” ideas about how women’s bodies are shamed and policed in society “through satire. Satire is a way to poke fun at the hardest things, bring darkness into the light, and enter difficult conversations,” (Ryan, 2018). A day prior to Ryan’s tweet, her co-star, actress Alyssa Milano (who plays Bob Armstrong’s wife Coralee in the show), shared a similar message within a thirty-minute periscope video she hosted, saying:

> I hope those of you that tune in and see the full show… will recognize that this [show] is satire. And satire is defined as the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people’s stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues. (Milano, 2018)

Ryan and Milano believe, because *Insatiable* is labeled satirical by the cast and creators, audiences who view the series and/or the series’ trailer should pay closer to attention to the ways the show uses satire as a device to start conversations about difficult topics, like about weight, body shaming, and the ways that bodies are policed in cultures. However, what the cast and creators of *Insatiable* fail to pinpoint, and what is so dangerous about satire in general, is "perception plays a significant role in [the] way audiences interpret the comedy," (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009, p. 226). Satirical messages in media are interpreted differently, depending on an individual's cultural understandings and perspectives. Although *Insatiable*'s cast and creators encourage their viewers to examine the show through a satirical lens, rather than a literal one, the show can still be misinterpreted. In fact, "satirical television has a history of misrepresentation, part of which can be explained by what Fiske refers to as 'excess as hyperbole,'" that is, exaggerated characters can have two meanings: one representing dominant ideologies in a straightforward way, and one challenging the straightforward meaning (Birthisel & Martin, 2013, p. 67). Satire is more than a simple comedic genre to "poke fun at the hardest things," (Ryan, 2018) or "ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity," (Milano, 2018). Satire is a complex form of humor.

Scholar Ethan Thompson explains satire "means laughing 'at' someone whose behavior or beliefs deserve ridicule," (Thompson, 2009, p. 41). If that is the case, then *Insatiable* does not use satire properly. In *Insatiable*, almost every single character deserves to be ridiculed, especially in regards of the way the characters discriminate against Patty and other fat characters, based on their body size. However, the show does not cue the audience to laugh at characters during such scenes. A critic of the show argues *Insatiable* is not satirical whatsoever, explaining "*Insatiable* is satire in the same way someone who screams profanities out a car window is a spoken-word poet. Satire requires a point of view; this has none. It… requires some feel for humor, however dark; this has none," (Holmes, 2018). Another argued, rather than being satirical, *Insatiable* “feels awkwardly retrograde,” (Gilbert, 2018a). *Insatiable*’s attempt at satire appears even more problematic when compared to the satire in *Dietland*, television writer Marti Noxon’s adaption of Sarai Walker’s novel of the same name. In the ten-episode AMC series, the show follows the life of “a reclusive woman named Plum who learns, over the course of [the series], how to reject the world’s conception of her and her body” (Gilbert, 2018a). Like the premise of *Insatiable*, *Dietland* shows the ways the lead character desires thinness and how “the world tells Plum *she’s* the problem” due to her fatness, among other factors of her identity; however, by the end of the show, *Dietland* “suggests an alternate possibility instead. What if Plum doesn’t need to change at all? What if the world does?” (Gilbert, 2018a). By the end of *Dietland,* thinness is not desirable, nor is it achieved. In addition, Plum’s fat identity is never “presented as a punch line,” (Gilbert, 2018a). Yet, the same cannot be said for Patty’s fat identity in *Insatiable.* Ultimately, as Gilbert explains in her article in *The Atlantic,* “*Dietland* is symbolic of larger body-positive movements outside the show, [whereas] *Insatiable*…is a timely reminder of how popular culture has always treated larger bodies” (Gilbert, 2018a). She goes on to explain one problem with *Insatiable* is the overall tone; “the most depressing part of *Insatiable* isn’t that Patty’s thinness brings her happiness [because it doesn’t.] It’s that it brings her power,” (Gilbert, 2018a). *Insatiable*’s creators and cast do not fully understand satire as a category, and as a result, they do not see the problematic nature of their series. As a result, *Insatiable*’s creators are unsuccessful in their attempt to portray a real, authentic, positive representation of a fat American identity that can ultimately send a body positive message to the show’s audience.

Responses to *Insatiable*:

Because over 200,000 online users petitioned for the show to be canceled (Given, 2018), *Insatiable*’s 12 percent score on *Rotten Tomatoes* is not surprising (Insatiable, n.d.a). What is unexpected, though, is according to *Rotten Tomatoes* as of April 2019, 83 percent of users who rated the show liked it (Insatiable, n.d.). According to IMDb as of April 2019, the series' average star rating is a 6.7 out of 10 (Insatiable, n.d.b). Clearly, reactions to the show are mixed. Twitter user @ellaberrend explains, "#Insatiable featuring [Debby Ryan] is teaching their targeted demographic that someone is automatically attractive due to extreme loss of weight," (ellaberrend, 2018). In direct response, Twitter user @iBlancaMichelle replied, "Actually, I'm a fatty myself but don't feel offended with the show…. [Patty] isn't seen attractive after she lost weight and she still struggled. It [emphasizes] that 'being skinny doesn't mean shit if you're ugly on the inside'," (iBlancaMichelle, 2018). A day prior, Twitter user @mollzburdy created a multi-tweet thread, writing, "As someone who has faced Binge eating disorder my whole life, @insatiable_ doesn't offend me in anyway…This show is real," (mollzburdy, 2018a; mollzburdy, 2018b). Another tweet acknowledging *Insatiable* as inoffensive, posted by Twitter user @pinhataissues, writes, "#insatiable is actually a really great show…it's [literally] mocking society, not fat people…. It's satire. It's dark comedy. It isn't meant to be offensive, it's just a twisted kind of humor," (pinhataissues, 2018). Of the viewers who defend the show, as shown by the above quotes, many interpret *Insatiable* as being successful in portraying its intended dark, satirical humor.

On the other side of the spectrum, viewers who do not like show expose the offensive, toxic messages that can be interpreted from *Insatiable*'s first season. Twitter user @lolmelizza explains, "the problem with [*Insatiable*] is… [it tries] to be satire and [fails.] if it WAS satire, we would be laughing along with the characters, but they truly missed the mark," (lolmelizza, 2018). Similarly, Twitter user @junpsuits writes, "verdict: [*Insatiable*] is worse than [I] thought it was," because it, "tries to pull off offensive jokes and humour but fails miserably," (junpsuits, 2018).

Twitter users recognize *Insatiable*'s mis-use of satire and comedy, and also realize the toxicity of what the show appears to portray. Twitter user @CauldronCurves states, "Labeling something dark doesn't give it a pass on being uncreative and toxic," (CauldronCurves, 2018). Like my analysis of the show, many public responses *Insatiable*, as evinced by the above quotes, argue *Insatiable*'s positive intentions fail to be communicated properly in its trailer and first season.

***Dumplin'*'s Construction of a Fat Identity:**

Like *Insatiable*, *Dumplin'* begins by acknowledging the existence of fat shaming and bullying, experiences very familiar to people who identify as fat. However, *Dumplin'* has an advantage *Insatiable* lacks: a fat writer who created the *Dumplin'* storyline, and is therefore qualified to construct a genuine and relevant portrayal of a fat teenage girl's life journey (Dumplin' Is, 2018). Near the beginning of the movie, a young Will, who might be around eight-years-old, exits her town's donut shop with a smile across her face, just a few steps before her Aunt Lucy. A group of three boys around her age approach and say, "Oh, my God, do you see her? You're honestly a pig. You're huge!" while oinking (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). Will's smile fades and transforms into a frown as she processes her peers' insults. The tone the boys use when delivering their words to Will is demeaning, taunting, and humiliating. In these few short seconds of young Will's life, she is told by children her age she is abnormal because of her size. Aunt Lucy enters the scene and shoos the young boys away before telling her niece, "Pay them no mind, Willowdean. The world is filled with people that are gonna try to tell you who you are, but that's for you to decide, you hear me?" (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). In response, Will's frown transforms into a big smile, symbolizing the comfort from Lucy's words of wisdom. According to Lucy, the opinions of Will's peers who fat-shamed her do not matter. Only Will's opinion of herself should matter. Here, Lucy serves as an inspirational role model who encourages Will to develop a healthy and positive body image. Since the message is also shared with the movie’s viewers, the advice is directed to them as well.

The movie then flashes forward in time to Will and Ellen relaxing in a community pool, coping with the loss of Aunt Lucy (see Figure 4). In this scene, Patrick, a teenage peer who could very well be one of the peers in the previous scene, disrupts Will and Ellen’s relaxation by canon balling into the pool, soaking the girls with water, and yelling “whale watch,” (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). As he exits the pool, Patrick looks at Will and laughs, serving as a cue that he is mocking her. It is not uncommon for male characters to direct negative comments to female characters, or mock them, in television shows and movies. In their 2007 essay on fat stigmatization, Himes and Thompson’s refer to an earlier study conducted by Fouts and Burggraf, which found, “the higher the weight of the female character [on television], the more negative comments she received from male characters,” (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 713). Will’s bullies in *Dumplin’* serve as an example of male characters putting female characters down because of their body size. In response to being called a whale and being soaked with water, Will’s jaw drops, foregrounding her obvious sense of insecurity. But, the moments of bullying, and of foregrounded insecurities, do not last long.

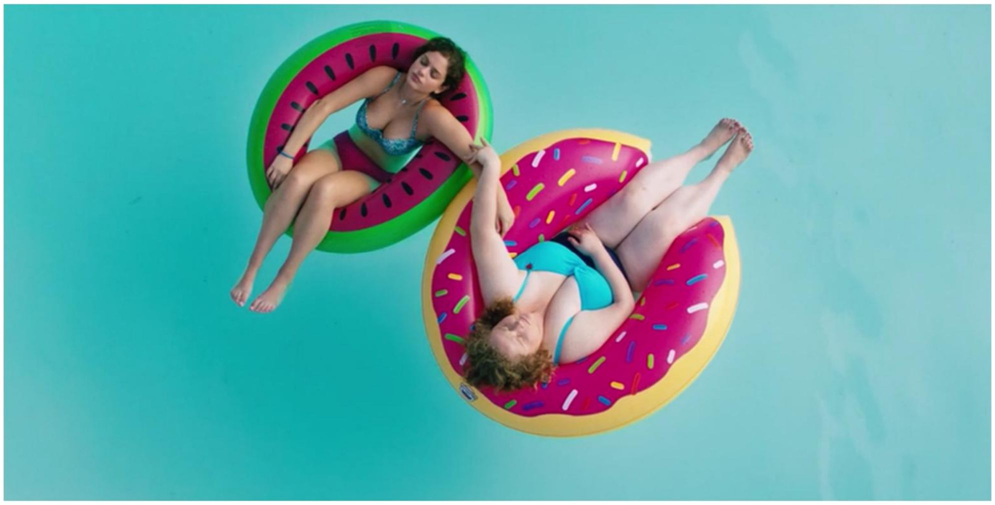

Figure 4: Ellen (left) and Will (right), from *Dumplin'*, relax in their community pool. (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018)

Himes and Thompson then paraphrase additional points from Fouts and Burggraf's study, which found, "audience laughter was significantly associated with men making negative comments about women's appearance," (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 713). *Dumplin'* viewers are not cued to laugh at the negative comments directed towards Will, though. Instead, viewers are cued to empathize with Will. Quickly, she and Ellen change the subject of their conversation to reflecting about summer days with Aunt Lucy, not allowing Patrick to ruin their day in the pool. By not making a big deal about the "whale watch" comment, beyond Will's jaw drop, the movie implies that Will is able to brush off the insult and not allow it to bother her emotionally. For that reason, audiences can interpret Will as being body positive and having a secure, positive body image.

Soon, Patrick jumps into the community pool again, yelling the same insult. As he yells "whale!", the camera cuts to show Will, who opens her eyes and looks off the screen towards Patrick (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). This time, the water splashes Will's fellow-fat peer, Millie Mitchellchuck. As the water hits Millie's body, her jaw drops, just like Will's did. Then, Millie starts laughing hysterically. After observing Millie, Will confides in her friend, Ellen, to confess something she worries she might go to Hell for. Will tells Ellen, "Whenever I see Millie Mitchellchuck, I think, 'I'm fat, but at least I'm not clueless,'" (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). In this moment, Will conducts a downwards social comparison and expresses a moment of insecurity. On the one hand, she acknowledges her own fatness, which could be interpreted as acknowledging her body does not fit within the culturally-valued beauty ideals. At the same time, she compares her body to Millie's, shaming her peer and expressing as a moment of emotional weakness. Here, *Dumplin'* demonstrates even Will is aware of, and takes part in, the shaming of bodies that do not fit within the narrow, culturally-valued beauty ideals.

Will does not consistently shame Millie, however. Her character progresses into one who stands up to her peer bully for herself and for Millie, resulting in a school suspension on her first day of school. In a tense conversation with her mother after getting suspended, Will expresses her anger prompted by the idea of evaluating someone's existence and worth by only paying attention to the size of their body, a concept that sounds similar to Gussis's intended message of *Insatiable*. Unlike *Insatiable,* though, the intended body positive message in *Dumplin'* is clearly achieved on numerous occasions, including when Will tells her mother, Rosie, she was always too focused on Lucy's weight, which held her back from ever getting to really know who she was beyond her body's size (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). Throughout the entire film, the characters (and the creators behind the screen) show the world, as Corissa Enneking puts it, "fat people don't just care about shrinking, or about desperately getting someone to love them;" instead, "fat people can be as diverse and interesting as every other character," (Tonic, 2018b).

The Making of a Body Positive Revolution:

Dumplin' viewers validate the film's rejection of beauty being size-specific and celebration of body acceptance and love regardless of size (Dumplin' Is, 2018; Tonic, 2018b). Of course, this is not completely unexpected, as *Dumplin'* author Julie Murphy explained, in a 2015 interview with Amy Poehler's Smart Girls, her hope for *Dumplin'*'s audiences is, "women [will] be comfortable with their bodies and know that they're not born and allotted a certain amount of square footage. Your body is your body and you've only got one of them…. Self-love is a roller coaster," (SmartGirls Staff, 2015). To reiterate, *Dumplin'* was written with the intention of sending a body positive message to audiences about the importance of self-appreciation and self-love, no matter the size of one’s body. Beyond intention, the movie adaption of the story highlights the importance of self-love, no matter one’s body size, to life.

In the movie, Will copes with her anger towards her mother by attempting to reconnect with her late aunt Lucy. To do so, she goes through Lucy’s belongings, and in the process, she finds her aunt’s secret, incomplete application for the Miss Teen Bluebonnet pageant from 1993. Lucy’s application inspires Will to apply for the pageant, telling Ellen, “I think I’m gonna sign up for the pageant and do what Lucy never could. I wanna march right in there on sign-up day just to see the look on my mom’s face. She’s always been embarrassed by me. Now she’ll have good reason,” (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). Ellen replies to Will, “Hmm. Kind of like a protest in heels?” to which Will replies, “Exactly. Like a protest in heels,” (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). Whereas *Insatiable*’s main character is inspired to sign-up for the local beauty pageant after losing weight and receiving words of encouragement and support from others, *Dumplin*’’s main character, is inspired to sign-up after reflecting on the oppressive standards upheld by the beauty industry (including beauty pageants), without expressing a desire to lose weight.

As film critic Guy Lodge explains in his review on *Variety*, it is “initially a vengeful streak that motivates Willowdean to try out for Miss Teen Bluebonnet herself, declaring her presence amid her skinnier, more popular competitors as a kind of ‘protest in heels,’” however, the “intended… act of rebellion turns revolutionary in a different way, when shy, curvy classmate Millie…and anti-patriarchy lesbian goth Hannah” follow Will’s footsteps in signing up for the pageant (Lodge, 2018). Together, Will, Ellen, Millie, and Hannah register for the pageant with an intention to “revolt against the oppressive heteropatriarchy, unconsciously internalized by the female psyche,” as Hannah states (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). In other words, the four girls intend to show their community, and *Dumplin'* viewers, the ways women and their beauty are evaluated in beauty pageants, and in Western culture overall, need to change so every body is regarded as beautiful. Body acceptance, appreciation, and love should not exist only for women who fit within the molds of contemporary beauty standards.

On the day of the pageant, Will, Millie, Hannah, and Ellen are all prepared, with smiles on their faces, ready to showcase their best selves to the crowd and prove their beauty and value, despite not fitting within the slim cultural standards of beauty, especially beauty in regards to the beauty pageant industry. The young women do not look out of place, nor do they look like they do not belong at a beauty pageant, a key commodified site of beauty standards. The girls exude pride, joy, and of course, beauty. Will, Millie, Hannah, and Ellen belong on that stage. During the beauty pageant, Will and Ellen take the opportunity to make a political statement while wearing their swimsuits, during the Lifestyle and Fitness portion of the pageant. When Will's name is announced, she walks onto the stage in her swimsuit with the words "Every body" taped onto the front of her bathing suit. A few seconds later, Ellen joins Will on stage (without being announced) in her own swimsuit. She stands to the right of Will and wears the words "Is a" taped onto the front of her swimsuit. Then, the friends turn around to allow the crowd to read the words taped onto the backs of their swimsuits: Will wears the word "swim suit," and to her right, Ellen wears the word "body" (see Figure 5; Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). In response, the girls receive a standing ovation from the crowd, signifying agreement with Will and Ellen's message. The support Will and Ellen receive serve as an example for *Dumplin'*'s viewers. Since Will and Ellen's body positive message is well received, then the same body positive message can (and should) be well received in our contemporary society. To ensure this happens, people must gather the courage to stand up for body positivity, just like Will and Ellen did while wearing their swimsuits in front of the crowd.

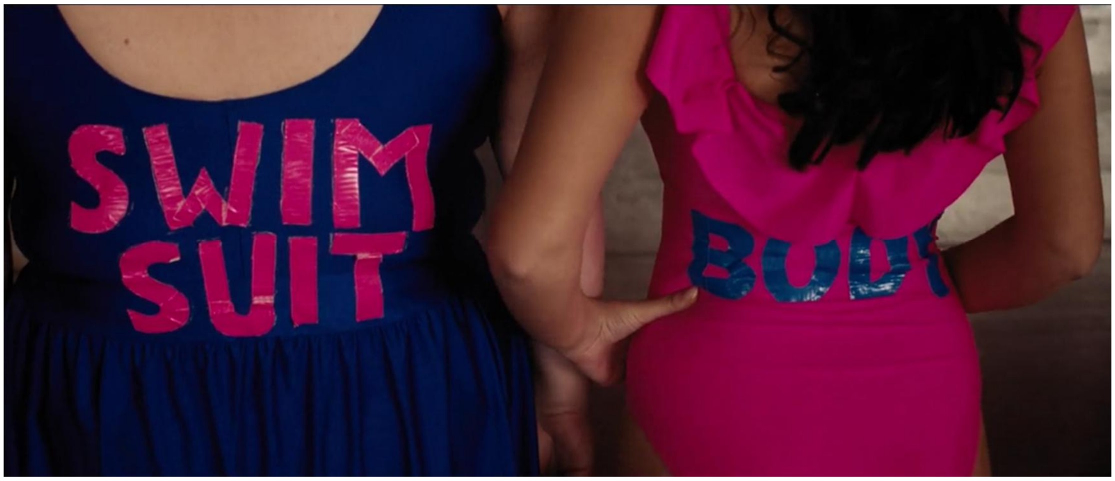

Figure 5: *Dumplin'*'s *Will* (right) and Ellen (left), wearing tape on their swimsuits, spelling, "Every body is a swimsuit body." (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018)

A key message takeaway from *Dumplin'* is not just that every body is a swimsuit body, a phrase associated with the body positivity subculture (Holliday, 2017; Reimel, 2017), but also that fat girls are beautiful, and their beauty should be recognized. Moments before the beauty pageant begins, Millie's mother storms backstage, prepared to take Millie home and prevent her from participating in the beauty pageant. Millie explains to her mother, "I get that you were just trying to protect me," referring to her mother's disapproval of Millie participation in the beauty pageant, "but sometimes I need you to support me," (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). The language Millie uses suggests Millie's mother would not consent to her daughter's participation in the beauty pageant as an attempt to prevent her daughter from being judged, shamed, or belittled. Millie acknowledges her mother was trying to protect her from any negative comments or treatment, but, she elaborates, "There's nothing in the rules that says big girls need not apply," (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018). Millie acknowledges that the size of her body is dissimilar to the size of most beauty pageant contestants. However, according to Millie, there are no rules saying beauty pageant contestants must be thin. Millie is not oblivious to her own size, and recognizes a fat beauty pageant contestant might seem strange considering the stigmas surrounding beauty pageants. However, she has dreamt of competing since she was 8 years old, and she sees no reason to not compete based on her body size. Toward the end of the film, Millie is awarded the title of Miss Teen Bluebonnet first-runner up (see Figure 6). Concurrently, the crowd gives Millie a standing ovation, displaying their support for Millie and her title. By winning the coveted title of first-runner up, Millie is evidence that plus size women are just as capable of success in beauty pageants as thin ones. Being plus size does not hinder one's ability to be viewed as beautiful. Millie overcomes a stigma, which makes her magnetic on stage.

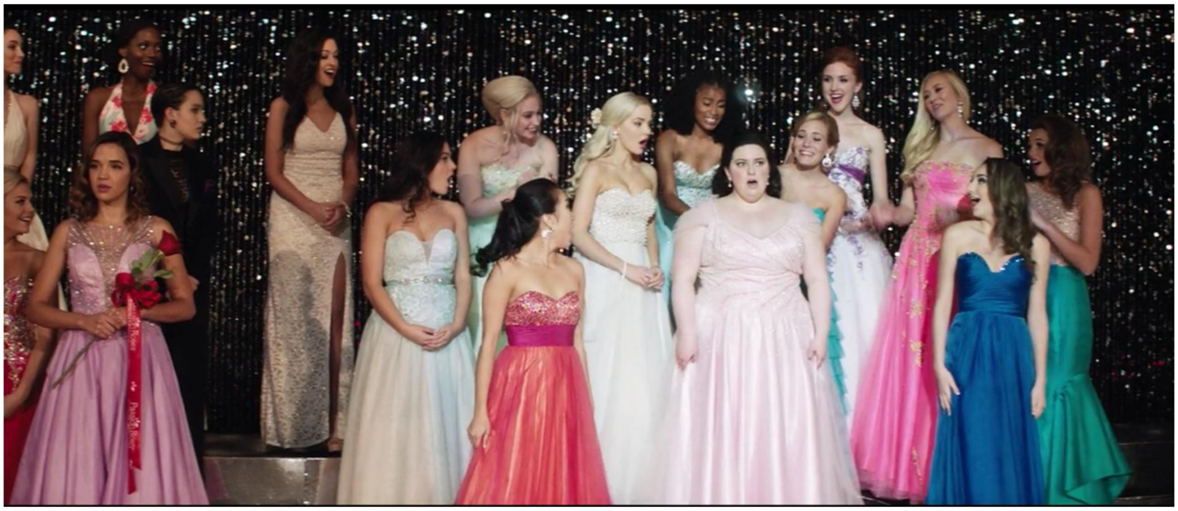

Figure 6: Millie (in the light pink dress) after being announced as the first-runner up. (Fletcher, Hahn, & Murphy, 2018)

Responses to *Dumplin'*:

Responses to *Dumplin'* are completely dissimilar to responses of *Insatiable.* Although like *Insatiable*, *Dumplin'*'s IMDb score is a 6.7 out of 10 (Dumplin', n.d.a), *Dumplin'*'s Rotten Tomatoes score is 85 percent, much more positive than *Insatiable*'s 12 percent. (Dumplin', n.d.b). *Dumplin'* received a lot of public support from members of the body positive community.

In an article in *Dazed*, Gina Tonic explains, Will "blazes the way for fat girls to not only enter [beauty] pageants, but succeed in them," and Will, "represents a positivity I haven't ever seen on a screen – one that doesn't seek to change her body to fit in, but to change the world to find space and celebration for her fat frame," (Tonic, 2018a). Tonic's article serves as evidence (that) the storyline in *Dumplin'* tells a narrative fat girls she has never seen before: a narrative that does not limit one's capabilities due to the size of her body. She says Will, "represents a positivity" that she has never seen on a screen before, a phrase worth emphasizing. Previous research exploring fat characters on television shows found, "heavier characters were more likely to be in minor roles, were less likely to be involved in romantic relationships, had fewer positive interactions than thin characters, and were often the objects of humor," (Himes & Thompson, 2007, p. 713). *Dumplin'* does not reinforce any of this, though. In *Dumplin'*, the main character is fat, but her weight is not used for humor, nor does it define or limit her abilities. Over the course of the film, Will becomes involved in a romantic relationship, with a handsome, thin man named Bo, who is not ashamed to admit he loves Will. She, on the other hand, is insecure and worries about what others might think of their relationship, but Bo does not care what others think. *Dumplin'* is proof that it is possible to create and watch media with positive messages about fat bodies.

In another review of *Dumplin'*, Sophie Gilbert, staff writer of *The Atlantic*, explains why the message in *Dumplin'* is a breath of fresh air. She writes, "Beauty, *Dumplin'* emphasizes, isn't about size; it's about finding and owning your identity," (Gilbert, 2018b). She then elaborates:

> It's up to women like Will and Millie to impose themselves in a place that has never wanted to welcome them, and to endure myriad humiliations along the way as they try to change the world. But they do, in fact, change it, or at least the small corner of it that they're trying to reform. (Gilbert, 2018b)

Gilbert acknowledges Will and Millie change a part of the world they're trying to reform, proving *Dumplin'*'s portrayal of the intended storyline was successful. Beyond intentions, *Dumplin'* actually presents a body positive, inspirational message.

Many Twitter users who saw *Dumplin'* interpreted a similar message to Tonic and Gilbert's after watching the movie. In a December 2018 tweet, Twitter user @JessWatchingTV wrote, "#Dumplin' is the movie fat girls deserve. The heroine is confident, smart and doesn't need to get thin or lie to get a boy to like her," (JessWatchingTV, 2018). Her reaction to the film acknowledges the impact of confidence and body size on *Dumplin'*'s story, whereas another Twitter user's reaction highlights the transformation Will goes through in the movie to find self-acceptance and love. Twitter user @lovepeaceelise explains, "#Dumplin is one of the best body positive and being comfortable with you are movies I've seen. Truly shows the transformation of accepting yourself and learning self-love," (lovepeaceelise, 2019). She associates *Dumplin'*'s story as body positive, aligning the movie with the subculture and social movement. Another Twitter user, @aimeereadstn, reacted to *Dumplin'* by emphasizing her shock and gratitude from seeing a body of her size represented in a positive way. She writes, "I am watching #Dumplin and I cannot stop thinking 'oh my god this girl is shaped exactly like me'. I'm 31 and I've never ever seen a main character in a movie with my specific, underrepresented body type," (aimeereadstn, 2018). All in all, reactions to *Dumplin'* serve as evidence to show the movie's intended message, and likewise the intended message from Murphy's book, are internalized by many of the movie's viewers. Based on such reactions, *Dumplin'* appears to successfully align with the body positive movement.

Conclusion:

This research emphasizes the importance of cultural minorities demanding visibility and creating media. By demanding visibility and controlling the construction of storylines, members of the body positive community can communicate uplifting messages to audiences. According to *Dumplin'*'s author Julie Murphy and *Insatiable*'s creator Lauren Gussis, both *Dumplin'* and *Insatiable* were created with the intention of showing that shrinking your body will not make you happy or solve any internal body image issues. However, the constructions of the Netflix series *Insatiable* was vastly different than the construction of the Netflix film *Dumplin'*. Having intentions of communicating a body-positive message is not enough to effectively communicate said messages. Intentions are not the same as depictions. Unfortunately, *Insatiable*'s first season reinforces demeaning stereotypes of fatness, as shown by the ways *Insatiable* fails to acknowledge the power of symbols, like fat suits. However, because *Insatiable* is a serialized show, which has been renewed by Netflix to create a second season, the creators and cast have an opportunity to redeem the show's narrative. Clearly, the representations of body positivity in television and film, like all other forms of media, are complex and demand further examination.

Chapter Three

How Media Exposure Impacts College-Aged Women's Understandings of Body Positivity

Introduction:

Research about the potential promotion of positive body image in media campaign advertisements by Convertino, Rodgers, Franko, and Jodoin, as well as research by Kraus and Myrick on the potential effectiveness of "feel good" advertisement campaigns like *The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty* on body image, establish the existing representations of positive body image in mass media (Convertino, Rodgers, Franko, & Jodoin, 2016; Kraus & Myrick, 2018). However, a closer examination of consumer body positive consciousness has not been fully explored. Brands and corporations are frequently exploiting the concept of "body positivity" in various mass media formats, including advertisements, television shows, movies, and so on. Because body positivity is such a new phenomenon, as discussed earlier in my thesis, scholars have not yet been able to draw sufficient conclusions that present solid evidence about the ways female media consumers interpret, and are impacted by, such media. In addition, there are also research gaps related to the investigation of the ways media representations of body positivity are shaped by, and in turn shape cultural consciousness of, the concept and its ideologies. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of the research gaps on body positivity, I conducted an open-ended, mixed methods survey to discover the ways college-aged American women reacted to body positive images and how they described the influence of media exposure on that understanding. More specifically, I wanted to interrogate the extent to which college-aged females believe media has impacted their understanding of body positivity and their feelings about their own bodies and beauty.

To guide my dissections and analyses of participant responses, I posed the following four research questions: (1) Do college-aged females describe the body size of models in American swimsuit advertisements that feature plus-size bodies in a comparable way to those of thin bodies? (2) What keywords and phrases do college-aged females most-frequently use to define "body positivity"? (3) Do college-aged females who have been exposed to multimodal American media forms believe media exposure has impacted the ways they understand, interpret, and respond to cultural images of body positivity? (4) Do college-aged females who have been exposed to multimodal American media forms believe cultural images of women in American media impact the ways they feel about their own beauty?

Method:

A sample of 26 college-aged undergraduate students at a small, liberal arts school in New Jersey were recruited to participate in the present Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved study. Students were recruited within humanities and social science courses at Drew University, through their professors, who invited them to participate but had no way to tell whether or not they did, as participation was completely anonymous. Because participants were recruited through professors at my school, rather than through direct communication with me, it is unclear if I had existing relationships with any participants. Participant majors, minors, and the courses that they have taken are also unclear. Students did not receive compensation for participation. They were asked to acknowledge their agreement for participating in the study using a form approved by Drew University's IRB, which described the research as follows:

> The purpose of this study is to investigate and understand how messages sent through American media affect college-aged students' understanding of the world at large through an American cultural lens…. [and also] to understand how college-aged students interpret media images seen in their everyday lives. To help gain further insights on this topic, we will ask you to complete a survey in which you will answer an array of

> questions to the best of your ability so that we can draw conclusions based on participants' responses. (Appendix B)

Participants were asked to complete a Google Forms survey that included three images and a variety of open-ended questions, 19 in all. The survey took, on average, between 15 and 25 minutes and remained open for seven days in total, after which it was unavailable. It is unknown how many students began but did not complete the survey, as only completed surveys were collected by Google. Of the 26 total respondents, 18 identified as female, ranging from ages 18 to 36 (average: 21.27); the other 8 responses (from students who do not identify as female) were disregarded in the analysis portion of the study. Of the 18 female participants, 11 identified as White/Caucasian, 2 identified as Hispanic, 1 identified as Chinese, 1 identified as Asian, 2 identified as mixed ethnicity, and 1 identified as racially ambiguous. The responses were coded using natural language coding to discern patterns.

In the online, open-ended survey, participants were first asked a series of demographic questions (age, gender identity, race identity) and questions about media exposure (how many hours they use media daily, what is their favorite form of media). Then, participants were presented with three images of American swimsuit advertisements and asked a series of questions regarding their interpretations and responses to those images. The first image presented to the participants (see Figure 7) was chosen for its diversity in representations of size, age, and gender.

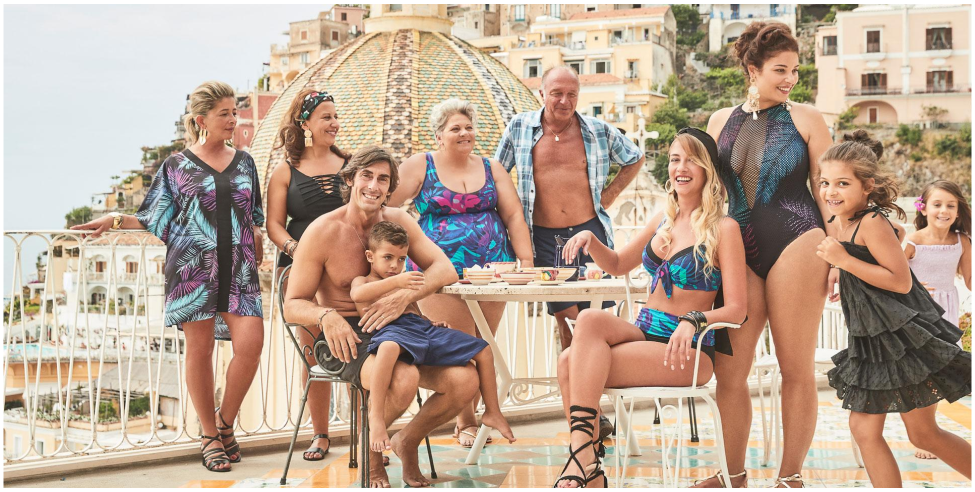

Figure 7: Image 1 in the survey, a *Swimsuits for All* advertisement (Swimsuits For All Ad, 2019)

The second image presented (see Figure 8) was chosen for its limited diversity in size, age, and gender.

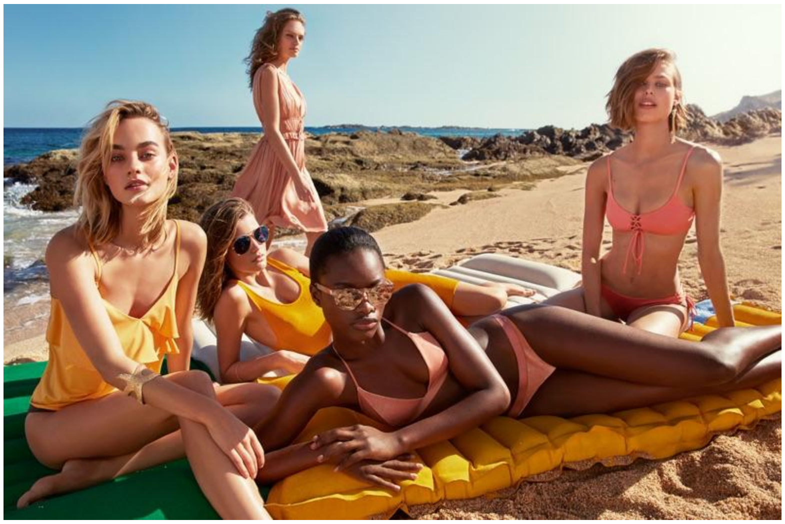

Figure 8: Image 2 in the survey, an advertisement for *H&M* (H&M Ad, 2017)

The third image presented to the participants (see Figure 9) was chosen for its diversity in representations of size, but limited diversity in age and gender.

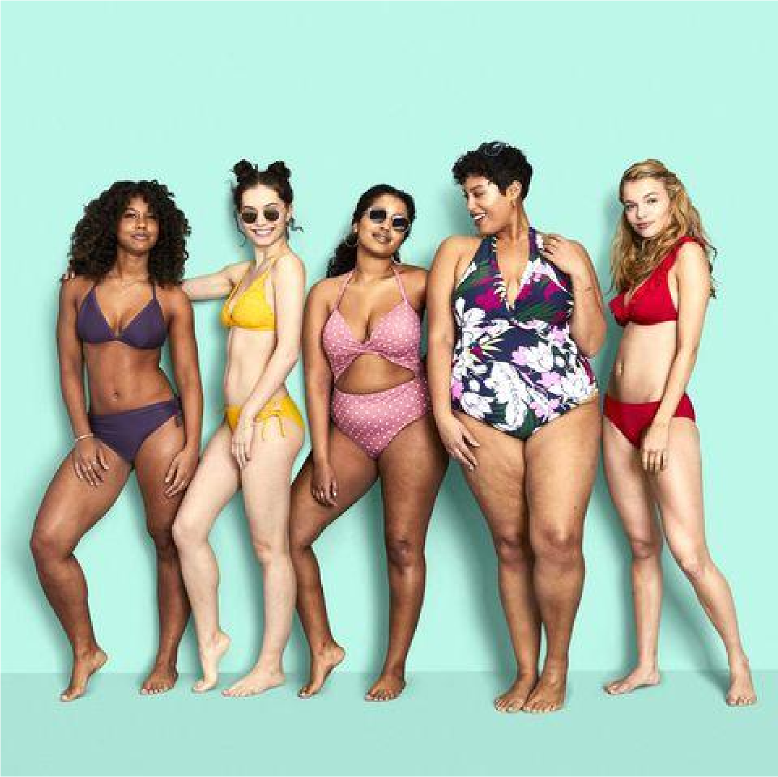

Figure 9: Image 3 in the survey, an advertisement for *Target* (Target Ad, 2019)

After analyzing and describing the three images of swimsuit advertisements, participants were asked to define "body positivity." After coding each definition, I then inserted the coded words into Voyant Tools, an open-source, web-based application for performing text analysis. Voyant created a word cloud of the most-frequently used terms in the data (see Figure 10). Towards the end of the survey, participants were asked to explain where they gathered their understandings of body positivity. Because responses were open-ended, I coded the responses to better organize them and find patterns.

All questions were carefully phrased in neutral language, to encourage honest answers. The survey ended by asking a series of questions about body positivity and media exposure, regarding their experiences with body positivity, media exposure, and beauty (Appendix C). I examined the responses in a Google Sheets document, based on common themes I noticed in the language they used, which allowed me to see which topics came up most frequently across participant responses and to organize the main points of the data into easy-to-understand outlines. This process allowed me to make generalizations and address my four research questions.

Results:

Are descriptions of body size comparable for thin-bodies and plus-size bodies in swimsuit ads?

Participants were asked to describe the models in each of the three provided swimsuit advertisement images. For the first image (see Figure 7), 12 participants described the models' body size (66%); for the second image, 11 participants described the models' body size (61%), and for the third image, 13 participants describe the models' body size (72%). So, it appears participants noticed and described the models' body sizes fairly consistently throughout the survey. When participants were asked to describe the models in the first image, six of the 12 respondents who recorded a description of body size wrote they noticed "different body types." Of the other six responses, two noticed "different body shapes," one described the models as "curvy," one acknowledged "skinnier" and "bigger models," one described the bodies as "mostly in shape," and one described "nice bod[ies]." For the second image (see Figure 8), five of the 11 respondents who recorded a description of body size wrote the phrase "thin;" of the other six, five wrote "skinny" and one described the models as having "long, lean bodies." For that same question, two of the seven respondents, who did not describe body size specifically, referred to the models as "in shape," but did not further specify body size. Then, for the third image (see Figure 9), three of the 13 respondents who recorded a description of body size wrote the word "skinny," one recorded the word "thin," one recorded the phrase "bigger girls," one recorded the phrase “plus-sized,” one recorded the phrase “largest woman,” and one wrote “body types are not idealized,” which describes body size, just not specifically.

Participants were then asked what message they thought the advertisements’ creators were trying to send to their viewers. Within those responses, I observed a smaller pattern of body size descriptions. For the first image (figure 7), five participants acknowledged body size (27%). Of those five, one acknowledged “diverse bodies,” one mentioned “all body types,” one acknowledged being happy “in whatever body you have,” one acknowledged swim “suits for all sizes,” and one explained she believed the image was telling its viewers “being fat is something to hide and be ashamed of.” For the second image (figure 8), of the seven participants who acknowledged body size (38%), three described “skinny is beautiful,” one mentioned “size 0,” one mentioned the figure of the women in the ad (but did not further specify that figure), one mentioned the adjective “thin,” and one mentioned “swimsuits for a specific size.” Finally, for the third image (figure 9), of the eight participants who described body size (44%), four wrote about the presence of “body types,” one wrote about “different figures,” one wrote “zero is not a size,” one wrote about the appearance of “size inclusivity,” and one wrote about body shape.

What keywords/phrases are most-frequently used to define “body positivity?”

The word cloud created by Voyant (see Figure 10) shows the most frequently-used terms in the data, as seen below.

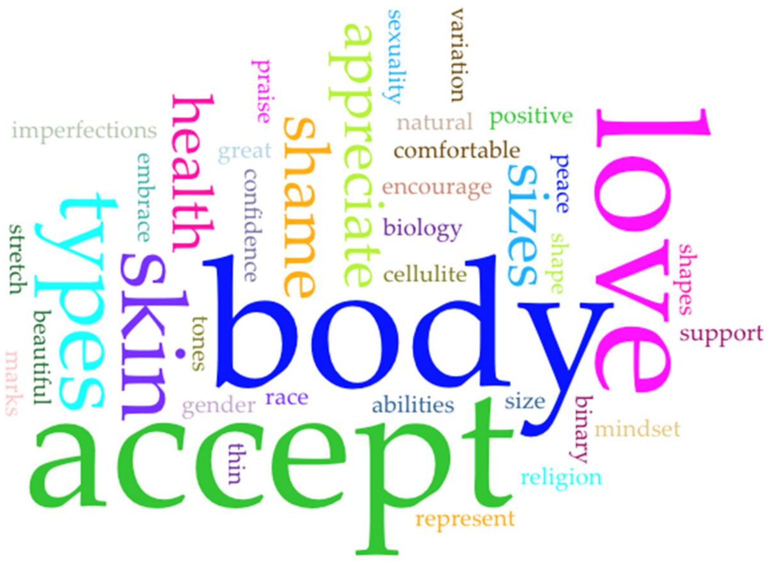

Figure 10: Word cloud of the most-used terms from participant definitions of body positivity (Voyant Tools, n.d.)

The most frequently-used words from all participant definitions of the concept included “accept,” “love,” “body,” “skin,” and “types” (referring to body types). Similar terms used less-frequently were encourage, support, represent, embrace, praise, love, peace, comfortable, natural, variation, shapes (referring to body shapes), and sizes (referring to all body sizes). Interestingly, two participants’ definitions stood out from the rest: one participant used health-related terms in her definition of the concept, and another used biological and binary-related terms in her definition.

Is there a connection between media exposure and understandings of body positivity?

After coding the responses from the 18 participants, I found 13 participants (72%) credited media with impacting the ways they understand body positivity, five participants (27%) credited family, four participants (22%) credited peers, three participants (16%) credited celebrities, one participant (5%) credited Google, and one participant (5%) did not understand the question correctly (see Table 1).

Impact	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Media	13	72%
Family	5	27%
Peers	4	22%
Celebrities	3	16%
Google	1	5%
N/A	1	5%

Table 1: All impacts on the ways participants understand body positivity (n=18)
Note: Some participants selected more than one option

Is there a relationship between representations of women in media and women's perceptions of beauty?

When asked if they believed media exposure impacted the ways they view or value themselves or others, 16 respondents (88%) said yes and two respondents said no (11%). Of the 16 who acknowledged media exposure impacting the ways they view or value themselves and/or others, eight respondents (50%) explained media exposure negatively impacted the ways they view/value themselves and/or others, with one participant explaining media has given her "body dysmorphia," and another participant explaining she "originally did not support fat people [because] it is unhealthy and [encouraging] bad health to others[,] but through social media I learned that [body positivity] is about loving yourself[,] not being okay with being fat or encouraging it." Of the other 16 respondents who described media impacting the ways they view/value themselves and/or others, two respondents (12.5%) credited media exposure to positively impacting their views/values, three respondents (18.75%) credited it to negatively *and* positively impacting their views/values, and three respondents (18.75%) were unclear on whether or not media exposure negatively or positively affected their views and values. Of the three respondents who recorded negative and positive effects from media exposure, all three explained media exposure negatively impacted their views and values; however, seeing bodies that resemble their own in media, engaging in conversations about body positivity in media, engaging with media posted by people of a similar body size, and engaging with media in which appearance is not the focus positively impacted the ways they view/value themselves or others. The data shows college-aged women believe media exposure impacts the ways they view/value themselves and/ or others. It also shows college-aged women credit the rise of body positive representations and conversations in media to positively affecting their views and values.

When asked if they have ever felt more or less beautiful after seeing images of women in media, 14 participants (77%) said yes; three participants (16%) said no, with one admitting to being insecure after seeing images of women, but not feeling less beautiful; and one participant (11%) did not answer sufficiently, admitting it is hard to feel beautiful with filters, Photoshop, and impossible beauty standards, but not saying whether or not she felt more or less beautiful after seeing images of women in media. Of the 18 responses to this question, seven (38%) mentioned body size in their responses. Of the 11 responses (61%) that did not mention body size, one (9%) referred to the male gaze; one (9%) described ethnicity/race; two (18.18%) described Photoshop use; one (9%) mentioned body features like fat, cellulite, scars, and body hair; one (9%) mentioned changing her eating habits in response to seeing the Victoria’s Secret fashion show, one (9%) mentioned comparing herself to other women in both media and the offline world; one (9%) mentioned not being affected by media exposure because she’s “confident”; one (9%) mentioned not being affected by media exposure because it promotes unattainable “perfectionism,”; one mentioned seeing models and celebrities with “perfect bodies” (but did not elaborate what makes their bodies perfect) and clear skin makes her insecure; and one (9%) recognized her thoughts of being less-beautiful are just in her head. Participant responses are evidence college-aged women believe images of women in media impact the ways they feel about their own beauty, in mostly negative ways.

Discussion:

Body Size Descriptions

As I examined participant responses, I quickly observed most descriptions explaining the size of plus-size bodies were vaguely-worded, while most descriptions of the size of thin-bodies were specifically-worded. For instance, when participants described the models in the first image (Figure 7), which features size-diverse models, eight of the 12 (66%) participants who describe the size of the models used the phrases “body types,” or “body shapes” to describe the sizes of the bodies they saw. On the other hand, two (16%) of the 12 participants described the women’s bodies more specifically; one participant referred to the women as “curvy,” and one described “skinner” and “bigger models” in the image. In response to the next image of models (Figure 8), which features hyper-thin models, 11 participants (61%) described the size of models using the terms “thin,” “skinny,” or “long, lean bodies.” These results reveal, when presented with an image of women of diverse body sizes, college-aged women describe the bodies broadly as having different body types or body shapes, rather than referring to women as thin, plus-size, fat, curvy, and/or generalizing their size in clothing. On the other hand, when presented with an image of women of hyper-thin bodies, college-aged women describe the bodies specifically as thin and/or skinny. These results could suggest a disconnect in the ways college-aged females internalize the representations of diverse body sizes in media images. Or, perhaps these results suggest college-aged women, in regards to this study specifically, are not sure what descriptive words are politically-correct when describing plus-size/fat bodies. For that reason, they might use broader terms, such as referring generally to “body sizes,” “body shapes,” and/or “body types.” In addition, these findings could suggest college-aged females might not see body-size diversity in media enough, or at least as consistently as they see hyper-thin diversity, to be comfortable classifying the body sizes in specific phrases, such as “plus-size,” “fat,” “curvy,” or otherwise.

Definitions of Body Positivity

The results of my survey show college-aged females associate the words acceptance, love, encouragement, support, representations, embrace, praise, peace, body shapes, body sizes, and body types with the concept of “body positivity.” No two responses were completely identical when respondents defined the concept of “body positivity,” which leads me to assume participants defined this concept based on their perceived understandings of “body positivity,” rather than looking up a definition for the concept online. These results suggest, for the most part, college-aged females understand body positivity as a form of acceptance and loving all bodies, regardless of size or shape. However, it is fascinating that one participant defined body positivity as being “healthy,” and explained being “thinner might be better for her.” This participant associated health and body size with body positivity. Another participant defined body positivity as “acknowledging that there is biological variation in the female form and accepting that variation is not binary,” which connects biology to the concept of body positivity. This same participant further explained in her definition that the “majority of those forms of variation are not indicative of poor health,” which acts as a contradictory definition from the previous participant’s definition of body positivity being connected to health and body size.

Media Exposure and Understandings of Body Positivity

The results of this survey show the majority of college-aged women (72% of participants from this study) believe media exposure impacts the ways they understand body positivity. This finding aligns with previous research, which found correlations between women's exposure to media and body image disturbances (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Bergstrom, Neighbors, & Malheim, 2009; Tiggemann, Slater, Bury, Hawkins, & Firth, 2013; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). To reiterate, multiple studies, including this one, have found a positive correlation between media exposure and body image. Media, however, is not the only influence on understandings of body positivity; participants in this study also acknowledged family, peers, celebrities, and search engines like Google as having an impact on their understanding of the concept. Because research shows media, and celebrities, have such a large impact on women's body image, the practice of body positive advocates demanding visibility in oppressive spaces is extremely important. So long as body positive advocates create messages in media with intentions to change the discourse about bodies, beauty, and self-worth, media consumers will be afforded opportunities to see and translate those messages into their personal lives. As demonstrated by my analysis of Netflix's *Dumplin'* and *Insatiable* in chapter two of this thesis, media forms are now being evaluated by audiences with body positive lenses. Therefore, one can assume that the more body-positive messages circulating in media, the more likely media consumers' positive body image will strengthen.

Media Exposure and Beauty Perceptions

Like the previous point, the results of this survey suggest the majority of college-aged women (88%) believe media forms have impacted the ways they view/value themselves or others. In a similar way, the majority of participants in this study (77%) admit their perceptions of beauty have been altered after seeing images of women in the media. For these reason, it is important that plus-size fashion models and self-proclaimed body positive advocates Ashley Graham and Tess Holliday, who are referenced in chapter one of this thesis, continue to use their public platforms in media and the fashion industry to spread activist messages about beauty not being size-specific. By doing so, their body positivity messages can be consumed, and perhaps even adopted, by media consumers, ultimately changing the ways media consumers think about beauty.

Disclosures and Future Research

The results of my study show the majority of college-aged female participants recognize media exposure as a main influence on their understandings of body positivity, and also that media exposure affects the ways they view/value bodies and beauty, in predominantly negative ways. Because this study's pool was limited to 18 participants of mostly white/Caucasian race, the findings are limited and may not be representative of the entire community of college-aged women. Further research is needed to examines the effects of media exposure on a larger group of participants, filled with greater race diversity.

Conclusion:

This study attempted to establish the effects of media exposure on college-aged women's understanding of, and relationship to, body positivity, as well as their perceptions and values of beauty and self-worth. This research also explored the ways college-aged women interpret and describe the size of bodies they see in media. Through a series of primarily qualitative questions posed to college-aged women, I investigated how their reactions to media exposure molded their observations and experiences with body positivity. I coded the open-ended survey responses in an attempt to find connections or disconnections with media exposure and relatability to body positivity. Ultimately, the results of my survey suggest there *is* a connection between media exposure and body positivity: college-aged women believe media exposure impacts their views and values, and their perceptions of beauty. In addition, college-aged women acknowledge existing body positive representations and conversations on media are positively affecting the ways they view/value themselves and others, and the ways they feel about their own beauty and worth. Furthermore, the results of my survey also suggest there are not enough positive representations of size-diversity in media, and as a result, college-aged females who are instructed to describe models they see in media images are less comfortable specifying the size of plus-size/fat bodies than they are specifying the size of thin bodies. Therefore, the findings of my survey suggest representations of body positivity and of diverse bodies in American media exist; however, such representations are very limited and must be expanded.

Conclusion:

The body positive community exists as a subculture, challenging the normative beauty ideals with the belief that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes. Recently, the body positive subculture has been commodified by powerful people and brands, like the fashion industry, resulting in the community being targeted as consumers. In an attempt to generate body positive consumers, brands and industries are representing body positivity and members of the body positive community, like plus-size bodies. As a result, members of the body positive subculture, like advocates Ashley Graham and Tess Holliday, are being afforded more opportunities to be visible in mainstream media. From there, the advocates can add additional meaning to mainstream media messages, like promote self-acceptance, self-confidence, and self-love in addition to marketing the sales of magazines they are on the cover of. In doing so, they can show the world beauty comes in all shapes and sizes. Members of the body positive community who are demanding visibility, then, are potentially empowering all audiences who see their messages to alter the ways they view, judge, and value people's bodies and capabilities.

By demanding visibility, body positive activists attempt to alter the discourse about body positivity in Western mass media, so culturally marginalized people are inspired to accept and love their bodies as they are, rather than be told their bodies are not worthy of love unless they conform to the narrow cultural standards of beauty. Evidently, some attempts from members of the body positive have been successful. In the comments section of Graham and Holliday's Instagram posts, referenced to in chapter one, numerous Instagram users expressed joy in response to seeing the models' bodies represented in a positive manner on magazine covers, spaces that have been known to discriminate against bodies that do not fit within the contemporary beauty standards. Similarly, as referenced in chapter two, a plus-size Twitter user expressed elation after seeing a body resembling her own, being portrayed in a positive manner, as the main character in Netflix's movie, *Dumplin'*. So long as members of the body positive community continue to demand visibility in cultural spaces, like mass media, we can anticipate messages in media shifting from ones that promote negativity and body dissatisfaction to ones that are positive and promote empowerment. Media exposure, as explained in chapter three, has a large impact on young women's body image and understandings of concepts like body positivity. If body positive messages continue to demand visibility in spaces like media, then the Western culture is on its way to becoming a more accepting, less discriminatory society.

Clearly, there are many gaps in the research on body positivity. Further research is needed in many areas, beginning with a better definition of what body positivity is and a complete roadmap of the origins of body positivity. In addition, further research is needed to investigate the ways body positive ideologies are represented in media, and how those representations are interpreted by audiences. Although I have attempted to analyze such information, with the goal of starting a conversation on these issues, additional research is needed to either support my investigation or further complicate my findings.

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Appendix A: **Recruitment Email**

Hi Professor,

My name is Brianna Siciliano, and I'm a senior English major at Drew. For my Honors Thesis, I'm looking to survey Drew University students about how college-aged students respond to media exposure through decoding and responding to cultural images. Participants will be shown images and asked to answer open-ended questions in response on a Google Forms survey. The survey should take approximately 15 to 25 minutes of each participants' time.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could mention my study to your students and provide them with the link so they can participate if they choose to, perhaps through an email or a Moodle announcement. Participant responses will be completely anonymous. The survey will be open for one week, starting today. Here's the link: **[insert link].**

Please feel free to pass this message along to other social science and humanities professors at Drew.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact myself at bsiciliano@drew.edu, or Dr. Lisa Lynch at llynch1@drew.edu.

Thank you so much!
Brianna Siciliano

Appendix B: **Consent Form**

CONSENT FORM

1. SUMMARY AND KEY INFORMATION

You are invited to be a participant in a research study that investigates how college-aged students understand, interpret, and respond to cultural images. Your participation is voluntary. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an undergraduate student at Drew University. The purpose of this study is to investigate and understand how messages sent through American media affect college-aged students' understanding of the world at large through an American cultural lens. The survey should take approximately 15 to 25 minutes of your time. As part of the study, you will answer a few demographic questions, analyze three images, provide a definition for a key term, and finally answer a few questions relating to media exposure and how media exposure affects you. As part of this study, you may experience some psychological discomfort, and may find yourself comparing yourself to the models seen in the provided images. However, the risks are no greater than the risks caused by media images that participants view and engage with in ordinary, daily life. After participating in this study, you may feel inclined to analyze the media you see and interact with differently, paying closer attention to the motives and outcomes of media's messages.

The study is being conducted by Brianna Siciliano, senior undergraduate English major at Drew University, and Dr. Lisa Lynch, Program Director and Associate Professor of Media and Communications at Drew University.

2. BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study is to understand how college-aged students interpret media images seen in their everyday lives. To help gain further insights on this topic, we will ask you to complete a survey in which you will answer an array of questions to the best of your ability so that we can draw conclusions based on participants' responses.

3. DURATION

The length of time you will be involved with this study is approximately between 15 and 25 minutes.

4. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things: First, you will be asked to answer a few demographic questions (about age, gender, and race). Next, you will be asked about your typical daily media use and media preferences. Then, you will be presented with three different images and asked questions to understand how you interpret each image. You will respond with as much detail as you feel necessary. Then, you will be asked to define a term relating to bodies and appearance. After that, you will be asked if you have watched and/or engaged with forms of media that relate to that term, and if those media forms have affected the way you feel about yourself and your appearance. As a participant, you may end your participation at any time without consequence or penalty. To do so, simply exit the survey. Doing so will prevent your responses from being recorded.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS

This open-ended survey may cause potential psychological risks. The research focuses on cultural images and interpretations of those images, which can relate to body image and beauty. Body image and beauty can be sensitive topics for certain participants to discuss. Some participants may feel uncomfortable answering such questions. However, the risks are no greater than the risks caused by media images that participants view and engage with in ordinary, daily life.

After participating in my study, participants may be inclined to analyze media they see and interact with differently, paying closer attention to the cultural messages that could be decoded through media's representations of specific demographics.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of the study are completely anonymous. You will never list your name, email, or phone number. The anonymous data will be accessible to Brianna Siciliano, Dr. Lisa Lynch, Dr. Sandra Jamieson, and Dr. Angie Kirby-Calder. When the data is published, it will not be possible for readers to identify participant responses.

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will not affect your current or future relations with Drew University. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships and without penalty.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

After you have completed the survey questions, you will be shown debriefing information about this study. The debrief will explain the purpose of this study in more detail, and explain the importance of your responses.

The researchers conducting this study are student, Brianna Siciliano, and faculty advisor, Dr. Lisa Lynch. You may ask any questions you have by contacting the researchers at bsiciliano@drew.edu or llynch1@drew.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researchers, you may contact Scott Morgan, current IRB chair at smorgan@drew.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Drew Institutional Review Board regarding my concerns.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

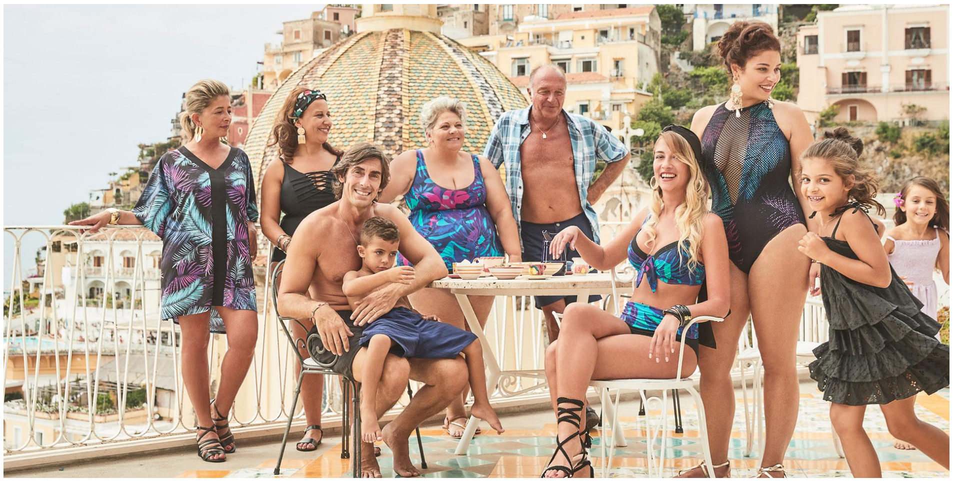
__Yes
__ No

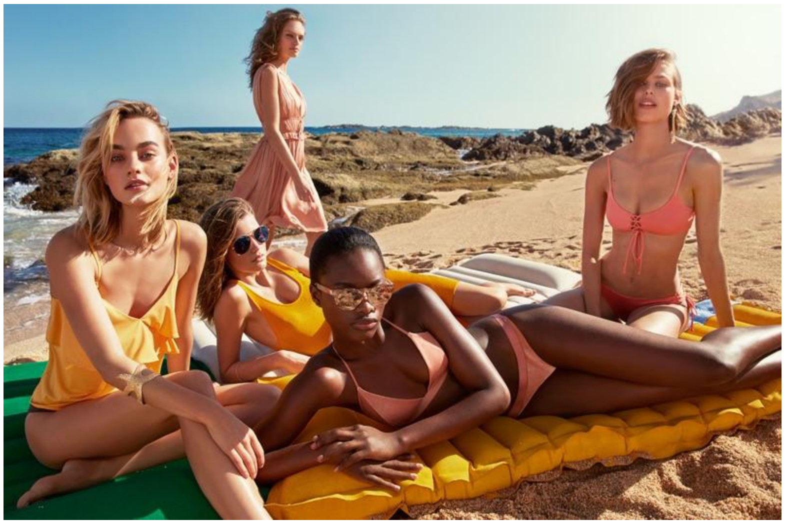
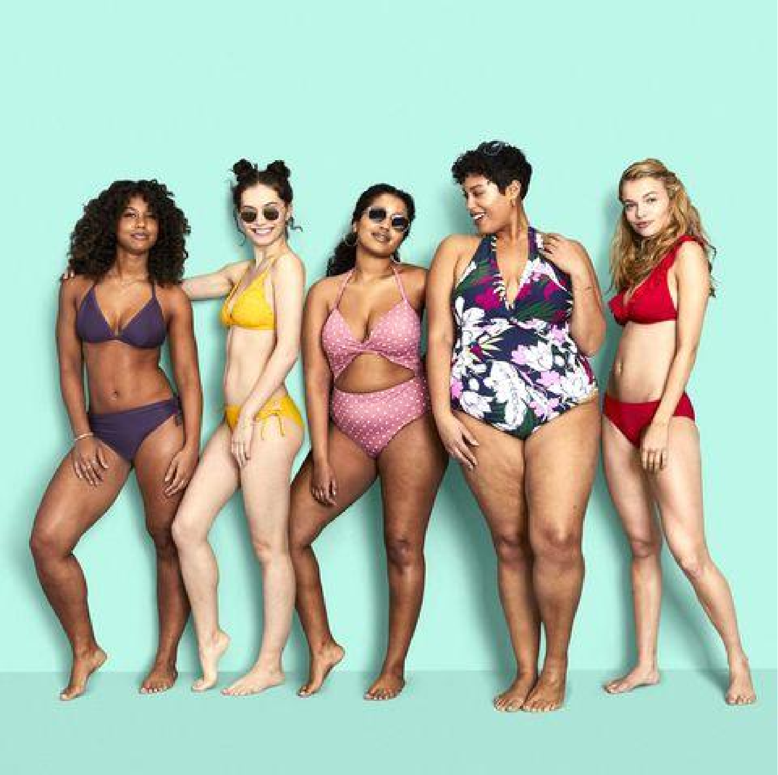
Appendix C: **Survey Questions**

Section 1:

- What is your age?
- How do you identify your racial identity?
- How do you identify your gender identity?
- What is your favorite form of media?
- Approximately how many hours do you think you spend each day interacting with media?

Section 2: Swimsuit Advertisements

- 
  - What are your initial thoughts after seeing this ad?
  - Describe the models in the image in as much detail as possible.
  - What message do you think the creators of this advertisement are trying to send to its viewers?

- 
  - What are your initial thoughts after seeing this ad?
  - Describe the models in the image in as much detail as possible.
  - What message do you think the creators of this advertisement are trying to send to its viewers?
- 
  - What are your initial thoughts after seeing this ad?

  - Describe the models in the image in as much detail as possible.
  - What message do you think the creators of this advertisement are trying to send to its viewers?

Section 3:

- How would you define “body positivity”?
- Where have you gathered your understanding of “body positivity” from?
- Do you think that exposure to media forms has impacted the ways you view or value yourself or others? Please elaborate.
- Female participants, have you ever felt more or less beautiful after seeing images of women in media? Please elaborate.

Section 4:

- Is there anything else you’d like to add?

Appendix D: **Debriefing Form**

DEBRIEFING FORM

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study in which you just participated was designed to show us, as researchers, the effects media exposure has on college-aged student's body image and perception of body positivity**.** Cultural images in media influence young people's understanding and perception of body image and body positivity; however, different media images send different messages to audiences about topics like beauty and body positivity. My main hypothesis is that that the majority of female participants would acknowledge that media exposure has impacted the ways they view and/or value themselves or others, especially in regards to self-esteem and body image. I anticipated that media exposure would negatively affect their understandings of their own beauty, because images with size-diverse women do not obtain as much exposure as images with thin-idealized women do.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study you were asked to decode advertisement images and explain what message you think each image was sending to its viewers. I did not tell you about my tentative title or hypothesis in advanced because I wanted your natural, authentic reactions. I also saved questions about body positivity for the end of the survey to prevent you from thinking about the concept of body positivity as you conducted your image analyses. If I had told you my expectation for your responses or asked questions about body positivity towards beginning of the study, you probably would not have been able to answer truthfully and naturally. Instead, you probably would have tried to answer in ways that proved (or disproved) my hypothesis.

3. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on the topic of this research, search for articles and books about body positivity (and/or body image) and media. Scholarly articles, like ones written by Marika Tiggemann, and books like Naomi Wolf's "The Beauty Myth," are great starting points.

4. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are interested in learning more about the research being conducted, or the results of the research of which you were a part, please do not hesitate to contact researcher Brianna Siciliano, bsiciliano@drew.edu, or faculty advisor Dr. Lisa Lynch, llynch1@drew.edu.
If you are interested in my study and would like more information about it, I would be happy to send you a copy of my paper at the end of the Spring semester. If so, please email me in May 2019 at bsiciliano@drew.edu, and I will send you a copy of my Honors Thesis.

Thank you for your help and participation in this study.