Fattitude The Movie: Theory and Praxis of Creating a Documentary that Examines Fat Representation and Fat Social Justice

by

Lindsey Averill

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisors, Dr. Jane Caputi, Center for Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Dr. Taylor Hagood, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Jane Caputi, Ph.D.
Dissertation Advisor

Taylor Hagood, Ph.D.
Dissertation Advisor

A. Papatya Bucak, M.F.A.

Adam Bradford, Ph.D.
Director, Comparative Studies Program

Michael J. Horswell, Ph.D.
Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College
of Arts and Letters

Deborah L. Floyd, Ed.D.
Dean, Graduate College

July 14, 2017
Date

Acknowledgments

On occasion, writing a dissertation feels like being lost in a desert sand storm. You're alone; it's ominous; the stakes are high and there is so much debris swirling around you that you can't see the way through to where you want to be. Luckily, in this metaphoric desert scenario, you're not trudging along, eyes down with no defense against the elements. In the desert storm that is a dissertation, you are lucky to be equipped with an intellectual and emotional support team who make weathering the storm possible.

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Abstract

Author: Lindsey Averill

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This dissertation explores the making of and research for the film, *Fattitude*, a social justice based documentary that looks to awaken viewers to the reality of weight bias in media representation. This dissertation reviews the filmmaking process and then engages with the nature of stereotypes about fat bodies. Deeply tied to feminist and fat studies theory, the work here seeks to categorize and shape the understanding of weight bias in the media by linking fat tropes to clearly understood images of oppression, for example the monstrous, the fool, they hypersexual and the asexual. The work also seeks to present theory on the nature of creating media representations of fatness that are not oppressive – making note of current media created by grassroots movements for body acceptance and fat positivity.

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Fattitude in Context: Locating a Fat Studies Social Justice Documentary in the Big Picture

Ultimately, this is the story, the background, the research, the conversations and all the theory that came together to inspire *Fattitude,* a documentary film. I'm one of the co-creators of this film. Film is never work you do alone. However, *Fattitude* was born from my academic work and originates with me, so I'm going to begin by telling you my story, the story of growing up fat and loved in a fat-hating world. I'm telling you this story because I genuinely believe that strong theoretical thinking is linked to our experiences, not severed from them. I don't believe political and theoretical legitimacy and argument must be birthed from an austere, clinical, objective perch. Or, if you want to get theoretical, in the context of second wave feminism, I proceed from the observation that the "personal is political" and to dismiss, hide or quiet my personal voice and experiences would be an act of dishonesty and, furthermore, the squelching of some of my strongest evidentiary sources, my experiences.

In 1978, I was lucky to be born to a warm, generous, and (also) thin upper-middle class family. In most ways, my life was the definition of privilege. My father is a successful, Ivy-League educated M.D. and my mother is a smart and very beautiful woman, who managed his office. We lived in Westchester County, NY in a big house with a pool, a day-lily-filled garden and a Norman Rockwell-esque tire swing. I didn't lack for anything. My experience was so grounded, supported and wholesome that I've been known to roll out quips like, "my childhood was filled with rainbows and cotton

candy, and if all children had parents like mine, then world peace would be right around the corner." I'm not trying to tell you that I lived in the glowing light of patriarchal perfection. No right-wing conservative thinker would perceive my parents as perfect. They fought. Their marriage failed. They were open about sex and bodies. They cursed and made a million mistakes. They got drunk and occasionally stoned. They did my homework when I was tired and cranky. And they loved me, every minute, all the time. That said, for my sake (according to them), they always wished I wasn't fat.

There is a picture of me: I'm five or six. I have on acid washed jeans and a purple sweatshirt with ruffles at the shoulder (very eighties). I'm hanging from the middle of a tire swing, legs dangling. My sweatshirt is caught on the rubber insides of the tire, and my little girl belly, round like a beach ball, pokes out, exposed for the world to see. I'm already fat, but in those days the people who loved me said I was "a little chubby."[1] And you could chalk this "chubbiness" up to some made-up failure to grow into my pudge—call it baby fat—only I can't remember not having this "chub." I was always fat. The same year this picture was taken, I went on my first diet. My mother took me to the diet center. I begged her to take me: I was already being teased at school. I remember sitting in the waiting room. I remember the fabric on the chairs. It was maroon. I remember eating rice cakes. I can't tell you if I lost weight; I don't remember. I remember understanding that my mother brought me to the diet center because the people there could "help" me.

My parents loved me and they spared no expense when it came to trying to help me get thin. I could attend any weight-loss program or participate in any exercise regime. The culture taught my family that thin was necessary for happiness and success,

so they genuinely believed that weight loss was the best possible option. In response, I spent the first 30-plus years of my life trying not to be fat.

Sometime around age 10, I went to fat camp. At camp, they provided us with portioned meals and we exercised at least six hours a day. During the summer three girls tried to commit suicide. I know that sounds outrageous, but it's true. I don't know for sure why these girls tried to take their lives, but I remember the communal feelings of desperation. I was very popular at camp because when you removed the stigma of fatness by creating an all-fat environment, people who are funny, smart and savvy can shine. I remember the pictures from the end of the summer—a thin me in a green striped top. It was one of the first times I remember feeling adorable in photos.

When I was 12, I went to another weight-loss center called 40 Carrots. I went with my mom, who by anyone's standard has always been thin but also has always dieted. I remember standing in the kitchen with her weighing out 4 ounces of chicken, seasoning it with vinegar, dijon mustard and pepper, chopping carrots and pouring water. I remember being hungry. I also remember losing 20 pounds. I got new clothes and felt beautiful. One day I walked into French class and a boy I'd known since kindergarten asked me when I'd changed so much. I remember feeling that that change mattered. Being thinner meant I wasn't invisible.

When I was 14, I went to Jenny Craig. I lost 20 pounds eating food made by Nestle that has little to no nutritional value. I remember daydreaming about getting to the Jenny Craig® "maintenance program," where I would learn to stay thin. Instead, I went on to gain the 20 pounds I lost, plus 10 more. During my later high school years, I tried

Weight Watchers®, diet pills, SlimFast®, the Atkins Diet®, Nutrisystem® and plain old starvation. I always lost weight and I always gained more than I lost.

I went to a private high school, where fifteen-year-old girls had personal trainers, and I was always picked last for team sports. I was the heaviest girl in my class and had endearing nicknames like "wonderblob," a moniker that came complete with a jingle modeled after a Wonder Bread commercial. I was never the lead in the school play, but I was often cast in roles that were originally scripted for men, the steward in *Anything Goes* became the stewardess, and the father in *The Fantasticks* became the mother. Once, while I was standing there, my mother complained that I deserved a shot at a leading role, and the school drama teacher exclaimed, "Well really, Lindsey isn't exactly an ingénue, you know." I was a junior in high school and weighed 160 pounds. Just out of curiosity—what's not ingénue-y about that? I mean, I was young enough to be an ingénue—so what could it be? I'm guessing my round hips and all-around curvy shape, which, despite my basically normal and medically healthy body weight, was considered fat. A good friend once relayed rumors that a guy or two thought I would be the prettiest girl in our class if I would just "lose a few." When I was sixteen, the catcall hollered my way was "heifer."

Fat was my identity but I denied it.

My fat body was easy to deny because I lived in a world where no one else was fat, but everyone complained that they were. In the introduction to *The Fat Studies Reader*, fat activist and *Fattitude* interviewee Marilyn Wann explains that in a "fat-hating society everyone is fat. Fat functions as a floating signifier, attaching to individuals based on power relationship, not a physical measurement," and therefore "people all along the

weight spectrum may experience fat oppression" (xv). Because of this 'floating' perception of fatness, it didn't matter if you were looking at the real people in the world around me—my mother, grandmother, aunts and friends—or at the people in the television shows I watched, the young adult novels I read, or the movies I dreamed of being in: ALL the women (and most of the men) called themselves fat, felt fat, repelled fatness, and feared getting "fatter." Fat was the enemy. Fatness equated to powerlessness. We were all failing because we were fat. Only I was fatter.

Fat was something that made you unfeminine, unwanted, not sexy and ultimately unsuccessful. So I was sure that my fat was a phase. All I needed was that one moment of will power—to truly dedicate myself to diet and exercise, and all would change. When I was seventeen, I neared the end of my time at the aforementioned top-notch private school. Graduation from this elite educational experience required an all-white dress, and in those days wearing all white meant dealing with the embarrassment of teetering down the graduation aisle feeling like Ghostbuster's Stay Puft marshmallow man. The metaphor here is intentional, rather than a young, thin, nubile teenage girl, I envisioned myself as the likeness of a white, creepily happy, bloated man/monster—completely disconnected from all notions of femininity, youth, beauty, and health. Of course, as a teen, registering puffy and masculine was an emotional nightmare because I lacked the intellectual nuance to recognize the constructed nature of gender stereotyping and the righteous acumen to flip off anyone who takes issue with my fatness. ("None of your beeswax, jerk!")

So, at seventeen, propelled by sheer terror, I lost all "the weight." On this particular occasion, I starved myself down to a size eight, the coveted single-digit size. In

celebration of my thinner body, my mother took me to Barney's department store on Madison Avenue and bought me a white leather skirt suit. I remember standing in the dressing room looking in the mirror and thinking there I am—the *real* me. The *thin* me. In other words, I was completely disconnected with the reality of my body. In those days, it didn't even occur to me that I was, in fact, a fat person. Instead, I pictured myself as thin, a model of feminine perfection—gaunt and gorgeous—imprisoned in fat flesh. Please note: I may have walked down the graduation aisle as the thin version of me, but I was back to being fat again in less than a year.

I broke up with my high school boyfriend in my freshman year of college and got thin again—this time I think it was 45 pounds. I don't remember which particular program brought about that loss, but I remember buying a skin-tight, brightly-colored paisley dress and wearing it so he would see what he was missing. I was fat again by sophomore year. I was happy in college. I had great friends. But I still felt body conscious, and I weighed 200 pounds for the first time. For graduation I asked my parents to send me to Structure House, a fat camp for grown-ups. At Structure House I lost 50 pounds. Then, I gained it back.

In graduate school I watched a newscast about a soap opera star who lost weight on a liquid diet—Optifast®. I lost 60 pounds doing this—three times—between the ages of 23 and 30. At age 30, I followed a program called Dr. Bernstein Diet and worked out like crazy to get ready for my wedding. When I walked down the aisle I weighed 172 pounds. I look thin in the pictures, but I wanted to be thinner. I wasted time on my wedding day thinking about how I could have looked prettier if I weighed less.

Do you see a pattern? It's not like I wasn't committed.

When I think about my body in my childhood, teen years and early adulthood, I remember crying a lot. I remember feeling like a failure and not understanding why I wasn't thin like my friends. I would have given anything to be thin, and I tried everything to be thin. I have always loved food, but truly, I wanted thin way more than I ever wanted food. Each time I was thinner I loved being thinner, and I desperately wanted to stay that way. But as soon as I stopped starving and started eating normally, I gained the weight back. Thin is not in the cards for me.

My self-perception and complete disregard or denial of my fat body is not even a little unusual. Lesley Kinzel, fat activist, blogger and author of *Two Whole Cakes: How to Stop Dieting and Learn to Love Your Body* explains that the thin-girl-trapped-in-a-fat-body-syndrome is a "popular lie" (87). Speaking of her own struggles with accepting her fat body, Kinzel writes, "My weight was but a casing for my real inner self, which was thin. One day I would cast off my fatness like an overcoat and become my true thin body…my size was purely temporary, an accident" (87). For me, for Kinzel, and for many others, a fat body was not understood as a home, a self, or a source of empowerment. Rather, it was perceived as an obstacle, which hindered fat people from achieving acceptance. Many fat people have no genuine connection to the reality of their bodies. Instead, they walk around believing if they could just commit themselves then they could reach their "real" weight—their *thin* weight—and in turn thin people look in mirrors and see fat bodies.

Until I was age thirty-two or thirty-three, I lived on this thin-seeking train to nowhere. I constantly cycled between days of absurd calorie restriction—four or five hundred calories a day—and periods of eating normally when the pounds would pack on

because my body was convinced I was starving to death (because I actually was starving it). Every weight loss resulted in a larger weight gain. My experience with weight loss and susequent gain is explained by "setpoint theory," an understanding of the human metabolic system that perceives weight as "genetically predetermined at a particular 'setpoint'" (Fraser 247). In this context the term *setpoint* is referencing the idea that a body is predisposed to particular amount of body fat, which results in a particular body weight. According to journalist Laura Fraser, author of *Losing it: False Hopes and Fat Profits in the Dieting Industry,* setpoint theory was first explained in *The Dieter's Dilemma* in1982 by Dr. William Bennett and Joel Gurin in 1982 (247). According to Bennett and Gurin, "the body defends the setpoint vigorously, resisting attempts either to lose…or gain pounds" (Fraser 247). Starvation dieting, like I pursued, upsets the systems that maintain a person's setpoint. Fraser notes that a "dieter's attempts to overpower the body's setpoint are foiled: the body responds by lowering its metabolism, so it can achieve its weight on less food," and then when the dieter –with a lowered metabolism– goes back to eating a normal amount of calories, they gain weight quickly (Fraser 247). So in my case, eventually 160 pounds became a lost dream and 215 pounds became a lived reality.

Culturally, fatness is understood as many things—a lack of beauty, a lack of health, a lack of intelligence and morality—but it is very rarely understood as a lived reality, a characteristic that a person is and most likely always will be. Instead, fatness is understood as a choice, and therefore people continue to believe that if you have a fat body, then you can make "choices" which will result in you having a body that is less fat. I'm here to tell you that diets didn't work for me. And because of the privileged life that I

was born into, I had every opportunity—access to nutrient-rich, organic food whenever I wanted it; gym memberships; coaches; therapists; doctors; you name it. And I'm still fat. If ridding oneself of fatness was as simple as eat less, exercise more, then it should have been easy for me. It wasn't.

Right here, right now, before I go on and delve into the nitty-gritty that is the work of *Fattitude*, it seems like a good time to state my underlying premise: Conversations about health and fatness are more about bias and stigma than they are about actual people's health. Culturally understood notions of unhealthiness are notoriously linked with fatness, despite the fact that thin people get all the diseases our culture associates with fatness (diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure etc.), too. And then, of course, there is the reality that all of us will eventually get sick and die no matter what we weigh. Yet, all fat people get grouped under the same condemned heading, although weight gain is caused by a multitude of factors—genetics, mental health, illness, medications, or consumption. This reality continues to play no role in the thinking of the average person. The assumption is that fat people are unhealthy and they are to blame. The fallout of this assumption is that we regularly fail to assess the actual health of individuals. Doctors tell a perfectly healthy fat person with good cholesterol and low blood pressure to lose weight. Why?

Currently, studies of fatness and the medical regulation of fatness are based on people's Body Mass Index (BMI)—which *Fattitude* interviewee and body-positive blogger, Pia Shivo-Campo refers to as the "Bad Mother-fucking Idea" because the BMI is a flawed and unreliable tool of human health measurement. In their article, "Beyond BMI: The value of more accurate measures of fatness and obesity in social science

research" Richard V. Burkhauser and John Cawley of the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University, explain that "there is wide agreement in the medical literature that BMI is seriously flawed because it does not distinguish fat from fat-free mass such as muscle and bone." Traci Mann, Professor of Social and Health Psychology at the University of Minnesota, concurs in her book *Secrets from the Eating Lab: The Science of Weight Loss, the Myth of Will Power and Why You Should Never Diet Again*, noting that "the use of BMI is controversial because the formula for calculating it is not based on any understanding of how height and weight related to each other, and because people who have high muscle mass tend to get categorized as overweight, despite having little fat" ("Diets Don't Work"). In addition to people with high muscle mass, BMI also fails when we look at children because they are short, basketball players because they are tall, and the elderly because they lack muscle mass. The perspective that BMI is flawed has been discussed by studies over the last few decades (McCarthy et al., 2006; Yusuf et al., 2005; Gallagher et al. 1996; and Garn et al., 1986).

Furthermore, the BMI fomula was invented in the 1800s by a Belgian mathematician named Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet, who "had no interest in obesity" (Eknoyan 3). He was seeking to apply "mathematical analysis to the study of man" to determine "defining the characteristics of 'normal man' and fitting the distribution around the norm." (Eknoyan 2-3). Quetelet's BMI was a statistical tool, not a tool developed by doctors or anyone thinking about health and yet today we use it as one of our primary diagnostic tools for determining a person's health status. Our primary tool

for measuring and studying fatness has nothing to do with science or medicine and, more importantly, BMI is not about individuals, it's about numbers and math.

BMI doesn't see individual bodies. In their scientific BMI study of 363 men and women of varying body weights entitled "Reassessment of body mass indices," Smalley et. al. found that "an index based on weight and height alone will not accurately diagnose obesity, at least for an individual" (408). BMI doesn't take into account relationships between individual bone mass, muscle mass, fat mass and/or inflammation. Defining people's health based on their BMI is like assuming someone's level of intelligence or compatibility based solely on their name; it's more bias than anything else. When you put together things like the faulty use of BMI and the failure to recognize that diseases affect those both fat and thin, you realize flaws in the collective culture's thinking about health. Our cultural conflation of the link between obesity and poor health allows for the practice of lazy and biased medicine.

I tend to agree with the stance on health that is relayed by the *Fattitude* interviewees in the film: health is a great thing and if health is possible I would hope that individuals pursue health. And clearly, getting your heart rate up during exercise, using your muscles and consuming nutrient-rich foods is better for your longevity than not doing these things. Importantly, however, pursuing health and pursuing thinness are not one and the same.

How many people do you know who have been on fad diets? The cabbage soup diet, the Beverly Hills Diet, The Zone™ Diet, the South Beach Diet®—the list is endless. Do you find that most of these people are hoping to be healthy? Or are they hoping to be thin—and to have all the privileges that thin entails? If health was really the concern, then

diets wouldn't be about numbers on a scale, they would be about medical tests, such as your blood pressure, your blood glucose levels, and your inflammation levels. Few people go on a diet and get a blood test every week. Instead, they get on a scale and they take "after" pictures in their old, big jeans. Quite often, when I tell someone what I do they inevitably say something like, "but what about health?" or "you do realize that by telling people fatness is okay, you are promoting unhealthy behaviors?"

After careful review of the studies that many fat activists use to justify fat health and fitness, I side with the Association for Size Diversity and Health's Health at Every Size® position, which supports healthy behaviors for people of all sizes, including celebrating bodies of all sizes, participating in joyful movement, and the consumption of nutrient rich food in response to hunger. I'd bet you whatever's in my bank account that my diet and exercise regime and blood tests add up to a better picture of health than the average thin American, despite the number on my scale. However I'm not going to get into these specifics here because I don't think that the question of an individual's health status has anything to do with social justice. *Fattitude* is about how media representations of fat people perpetuate fat hatred and the climate that allows for the systemic oppression of fat people.

Heath is not a mandate. Nor should it be. A person's health status should not mean that they are culturally demeaned. We cannot require health of our citizens without limiting human freedom. I'm a feminist through and through—my body, my business; your body, your business. The culture enables the judgment and oppression of certain groups and I think that's wrong in all cases, and I will fight for *corporeal justice*— the freedom to make choices regarding one's own body—in all situations. You don't belittle

someone because you don't like his or her heath status, or race, or height. People who live happy lives free of oppression are healthier, no matter what size.

Also, "health" as an idea is complicated - what does "healthy" mean? Is it mental? Is it physical? Is it spiritual? The conflation of unhealthy with fat bodies—and conversely healthy with thin bodies—is dangerous stuff. It functions like propaganda, blinding people to some very real and very ugly unchecked systemic issues. For example, what about food deserts and poverty—actual access to fruits and veggies. As Sonya Renee Taylor explains in *Fattitude,* we live in a country where many poor people don't have access to nutrient-rich food options, either because fresh food is not available in their neighborhoods or because junk food is both more accessible and less expensive. Are we considering that when we condemn fat people?

In her interview with *Fattitude,* fat activist and Berkeley-trained independent scholar who holds a Master's degree in Human Sexuality with a focus on the intersections of body size, race and gender, Virgie Tovar explained the actual relationship between fat hatred, health and social justice:

> [Fat people] are very much thought of as being purposefully unhealthy. And so, I always compare those narratives of moral deficiency, undisciplined, lazy-, these are the same kinds of conversations and language that have been used to describe people of color, that have been used to describe women, for a really long time. And so there's a really big class element and there's a really big race element because class is so deeply tied with race. Because if you know someone's zip code, you can probably guess their BMI. And because there are things like food deserts... So because of the way that people of the middle and upper classes can

> afford to have a fit body and are committed to having that body, that ideal is leveraged against people who are working class and poor, many of whom are people of color. And so you get into the nuance of the ways that inferiority is projected onto people and we're using this conversation of fat, we're using the language of fat, but make no mistake, we're talking about gender. We're talking about race, and we're talking about class. (Fattitude)

It's worth noting that economic stability and privilege do not always equate to thinness – take me for example, but that doesn't undermine Tovar's point that a cultural hatred for fatness masks or allows for other cultural prejudices —looking down on those who are othered. In Tovar's context, eradicating fatness is a conversation about getting rid of those that are perceived of as morally suspect, women, people of color and the poor. In this light the "obesity epidemic" becomes a painfully classist, weightist, racist idea. And in turn, this hatred allows us to see these othered people as failing because they are understood as being purposely unhealthy, rather than considering the factors at play in their health and weight status. Tovar goes on to explain that our hatred for fatness isn't actually a health concern by noting our failure to consider other health-improving ideas:

> I could probably list a thousand things, if you gave me a day, that would improve people's health that we as a country could be dedicated to that would not be based in discrimination and oppression. And none of us are interested in those things. I mean, for example, we could have a four day work week. I guarantee you we'd add cardiovascular health and years to people's lives and really improve their quality of life if people only had to go to work four days a week, but are we culturally preoccupied with that? No. No. And the reason is because we have been

> taught culturally that it is not the state's responsibility for us to be healthy, happy citizens. It is our responsibility. And if we deviate from their idea of what health looks like and is, it is our fault, not the culture's fault for having those standards. (Fattitude)

When considering health, Tovar chooses to point her finger at where the culture is failing individuals rather than at individuals who don't meet the culture's health ideals.

We can continue to debate the healthiest behaviors, but we cannot mandate them. We cannot judge other humans based on whether they adhere to them. That's not the world I want to live in. In other words, even though there is a need to educate the populous about the nature of heath and to discuss how "unhealthy" is often used to justify hatred for or stigmatize fat bodies, in the reality of my social justice framework, it doesn't really matter if a fat person is actually unhealthy. All people—no matter their race, religion, nationality, sexuality, ability, class, gender, health or body size—deserve respect and dignity and the freedom from systemic oppression. So, we need to take the steps to make sure that we are relieving that oppression. Period.

After years of scholarly therapy (read: a life in pursuit of academia), I have come to understand the extreme privilege of my journey and relationship to my fatness. Because of my thin parents' successes, I didn't have to worry about access to healthy food, medicine, education or employment. I do not mean to demean my own experience with fatness. I was bullied; passed over; assumed stupid, lazy, disorganized; and often looked down on by strangers, peers, medical professional, educators and employers alike. I understand that, like all people, I'm a product of my specific privileges and oppressions. I have come to understand that when I hated my own body I was participating in fat-

prejudice, and my distaste for my fat body was dictated by a cultural norm or social standard that excluded my body and other bodies similar to mine.

I have also come to know that in many ways our cultural understanding of fatness is directly related to how *fat bodies* were/are represented by multiple types of media.[2] In the updated introduction for the tenth anniversary edition of *Unbearable Weight,* feminist humanities scholar Susan Bordo describes the perspective of people like me, who grew up in and learned about body weight from a media saturated culture:

> Generations raised in the empire of images are both vulnerable and savvy. They snort when magazines periodically proclaim … that in the "new Hollywood" one can be "Sexy at Any Size." They are literati, connoisseurs of the images; they pay close attention to the pounds coming and going—on J. Lo, on Reese, on Thora, on Christina Aguilera, on Beyoncé. They know that Kate Winslet—whom James Cameron called "Kate-Weighs-a-Lot" on the set of *Titanic*—was described by the tabloids as "packing on," "ballooning to," "swelling to," "shooting up to," "tipping the scales at" a "a walloping," "staggering" weight—of 135. That slender Courtney Thorne Smith, who played Calista Flockhart's friend/rival on *Ally McBeal*, quit the show because she could no longer keep up with the pressure to remain as thin as David Kelly wanted them to be. That Missy Elliot and Queen Latifah are not on diets just for health reasons. (xxvii-xxviii)

With this passage, Bordo reminds us that the world all around us is filled with images and stories that ridicule and reinforce the idea that the fat body is repulsive. What Bordo is explaining, the fat-hate thrown at women—and honestly, all people, even those who may or may not be perceived of as fat—is only the tiniest taste of the fat bias perpetrated by

the media. The majority of the representations of fat bodies created by the media are undeniably monstrous or demeaning. Spend some time considering who is fat in books, on television and in films—jokes and monsters—representations like Disney's Ursula the Sea Witch from *The Little Mermaid* or *Austin Power's* Fat Bastard. These representations are not pretty or kind, and they underscore the reality that our culture has no respect for those living in fat bodies.

It is in response the existence of a fat hating media and its ensuing reality that I, Viridiana Lieberman (my friend and business partner) and our team of collaborators, have endeavored to create *Fattitude*, a feature length, full-color, documentary film that examines how popular media perpetuates the fat hatred and fat-shaming that results in a very real cultural bias and a civil rights issue. The document that you are reading now is my written accompaniment to this film—or rather a treatise on the process of conceptualizing, theorizing and creating a film with the intention of changing the national conversation about body image and fat hatred.

It is my contention that the current discussions about body image are not as nuanced as they need to be. *Fattitude* interviewee Lizabeth Wesley-Casella, an advocate for weight stigma prevention, notes that many consider body image to be a "touchy-feely" issue—or rather an issue that is solved by addressing an individual's relationship with themselves, when in reality, body image and individual body hatred are the result of an unchecked cultural prejudice—referred to by many names—sizeism, weight bias, fattism, fat hate, fat prejudice and weightism (Wesley-Casella).

In 1989, twenty-five plus years ago, Shelly Bovey, author of *The Forbidden Body: Why Being Fat is Not a Sin* wrote that fat people were experiencing prejudice:

> Racism, sexism and ageism have been recognized for the evils they are and brought into the daylight and named. They are part of the process whereby society rejects those who are different from the sociological role model, which has been defined as acceptable. Fattism is still largely a *hidden* prejudice … Fat is hated and despised and fat people are coerced to the outer limits of mainstream society. (1)

Bovey's notion that fattism, or fat prejudice, is "*hidden* prejudice" refers to the cultural acceptability of fat-hate. In a similar way—but more conscious of the oppressions that others face—I often refer to fat prejudice as a culturally unchecked prejudice. It is truly culturally acceptable to: make jokes at a fat person's expense; to belittle fat people on television; to write books about fat bullies, monsters and demons; to represent fat bodies as repugnant. And in turn it is perfectly acceptable to demean fatness in the real world. The idea that it is acceptable to dislike fatness results in legitimate and unquestioned experiences of oppression.

In an interview with *Fattitude*, Rebecca Phul, deputy director of the UCONN Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity explained that prejudice against fat people is a legitimate systemic issue. Her team has conducted "several national studies looking at the prevalence of weight discrimination compared to other forms of discrimination" and "among women" fat prejudice is "one of the top three forms of discrimination reported. Among men …it's number four" (Phul). Furthermore, Phul notes that when it comes to women, "weight discrimination is really on par with levels of racial discrimination." What she's talking about when she uses the term "discrimination" is clearly defined occurrences of systemic injustice. For example, when considering employment and job

success, fat people "are less likely to be interviewed for a job, they are more likely to be overlooked for a job, they're more likely to be assigned a lower starting salary, they are less likely to get promoted, and they're more likely to be terminated because of their body size" (Phul).

Despite the data and the obvious prejudice, somehow weight bias and fat hatred continues to be dismissed as illegitimate and acceptable. Both *Fattitude* and this accompanying text focus on making it clear to the viewer/reader that there is nothing simple or frivolous about body image activism and the fight for fat civil rights.

That said, the goals of this document are not without bounds. There are many issues that affect fat people that this document will not cover in depth, for example the relationship between fatness and environmental justice and food justice, or the way that studies of eating disorders marginalize not only fatness, but also people of color. *Fattitude* is a film about media representations and how those representations affect the perception and treatment of fat people; this document is meant to support that goal and situate *Fattitude's* conversations and presence within the context of the fat acceptance movement. I feel it is also necessary to justify the need for this film, define the nature of the film that we have chosen to create, produce and direct, and clarify my understanding of the film's placement within the documentary genre.

Fattitude in the World of Documentary Film

Informed by a post-modern, post-colonial, feminist background, *Fattitude* is very conscious and attentive to the idea that fat hatred crosses the lines of race, class, sexuality and gender, and therefore *Fattitude's* creative, structural and theoretical foundations are based on one absolute rule—do everything one can to produce a text that honors the

reality of those involved and breaks through the many layered oppressions of a heteronormative, racist, classist, sizist, kyriarchal culture.

The term kyriarchal was coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation,* Fiorenza defines kyiarchy as:

> a neologism…derived from the Greek words for "lord" or "master" (kyrios) and "to rule or dominate" (archein) which seeks to redefine the analytic category of patriarchy in terms of multiplicative intersecting structures of domination…Kyriarchy is a socio-political system of domination in which elite educated propertied men hold power over wo/men and other men. Kyriarchy is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression. (Glossary)

In "Kyriarchy 101: We're Not Just Fighting the Patriarchy Anymore," feminist writer Sian Ferguson explains "Intersectional feminism tells us that oppression comes in many different forms. Someone is not simply oppressed or privileged: we can be simultaneously privileged and oppressed by different aspects of our identities. For example, somebody can be privileged by the fact that they are cisgender, thin, and white, while being oppressed by the fact that they are queer, disabled, and female. Because of this, we need a word to describe the complex social order that keeps these intersecting oppressions in place." Basically, unlike the term *patriarchy*, kyriarchy is a word that more eloquently encompasses what intersectional feminism made clear – power structures are nuanced and dynamic and cannot be simplified. I have chosen to use *kyriarchy* here specifically because it focuses on the dominance of complex intersectional

power structures – in this case, allowing for the understanding that both men and women can be oppressed by fat hatred.

In an effort to dismantle the kyriarchal structures, the evidence that is used to make *Fattitude's* arguments has come and can come from a variety of sources—including but definitely not limited to personal experience. While this document cites many theorists and other academic sources, the film derives its evidence and argument from popular media and 50 interviews, which I personally conducted. Through these interviews, the film features a diversity of voices, including academic scholars, activists, plus-size models, fashion designers, Hollywood media makers (directors, writers, and actors) and psychologists.

From a structural standpoint, *Fattitude* tips its hat to other documentaries that have looked to critique the media as a perpetrator of unchecked cultural prejudice or creator of violent cultural construct, for example, *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), *Reel Injun* (2009), *Slaying the Dragon* (1998), *Tough Guise* (1999) and *Miss Representation* (2011). Each of these films looks at the tropes that are associated with a particular oppressed group or cultural construct: *The Celluloid Closet* looks at the history of homosexuality in the media; *Reel Injun* looks at representations of Native Americans in Hollywood; *Tough Guise* takes on the nature of the media's relationship to violent masculinity; *Slaying the Dragon* explores the media's portrayal of Asian women; and *Miss Representation* examines the media's sexist portrayal of women. In a general way these films follow a simple formula—they show lots of media that stereotypes a particular group, explain why this is an issue, and how this kind of limited representation can result in limited real world ideas. It's ultimately more complicated than that, but on a foundational level that is

the goal of this type of documentary. Like these films, *Fattitude* intercuts interviews, illustrations and media clips to show how the cultural climate is perpetuating dark and negative ideas about fat bodies. However, *Fattitude* goes one-step beyond the films mentioned here by focusing not only on identifying the problem, but also on presenting solutions that counter the negative mainstream ideas.

Fattitude follows a fairly traditional expository documentary style and uses a three-act structure. *Act One* looks closely at the tropes of fat people that exist in the media, explaining how these fictional representations perpetuate fat discrimination. In particular, act one looks at varied pop-culture examples, including but not limited to Jabba the Hutt in *Star Wars*, Ursula (Pat Carroll) the Sea Witch in Disney's *The Littler Mermaid*, Mammy (Hattie McDaniel) in *Gone with the Wind* and Barney (Chiris Farley) on *Saturday Night Live*. This section of the film also mentions the relative invisibility of the fat body.

Act Two shifts gears slightly, moving on from fictional representations to discuss fat bodies in "real" situations, including the news media, reality television, as well as the legitimate real world consequences of weight bias. Like *Act One, Act Two* uses media clips as examples, pulling from news broadcasts, advertisements, magazines, and shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *Oprah*. This section of the film also examines concepts like fat shaming and thin privilege. To clarify, fat shaming and thin privilege are terms often used by fat activists and the body positive movement. Tovar defines fat shaming as "the cultural norm around the idea that fat is negative and that fat people deserve to feel shame," thus creating a culture where non-fat individuals are justified in verbally

shaming or condemning fat people (Fattitude). Giving examples of fat shaming in her interview with *Fattitude*, family psychologist and fat activist, Sheila Addison notes:

> fat shaming is that kind of coded well-intentioned advice like, oh you know, you'd look so pretty if you'd just drop five or ten or forty pounds or whatever it is. Or well, if you're angry that you can't find anything to wear at the store, you could do something about that.... The dialogue around whether it's fair for larger bodied people to take up room on an airplane or on a bus seat, is a kind of fat shaming because really underneath that dialogue is a sort of like, maybe you should-, just shouldn't leave the house and like go out in the world and be fat at people.

In contrast to fat shaming, culture privileges thin bodies. In her interview with *Fattitude* Melissa Fabello, the editor of *Everyday Feminism*, who is pursuing a Ph.D. concerned with the intersection of fat studies, sexuality studies and research into eating disorders, explains thin privilege:

> Thin Privilege is the idea that in society, thin people are given power and privileges that other people are not. One way that I try to explain that to people is by saying that if I [Fabello is thin] walk onto an airplane, I know I'm going to fit in the seat. If I walk into a classroom that has one of those desks, I know that I will fit into the seat. If I go into a clothing store, I know I'm going to find clothes in my size... I know that if I go to the doctor, the doctor isn't going to tell me that if I just lose weight, then everything will be fine. My concerns are taken seriously and my body is

not looked at in a negative way by society regardless of how I feel about my body.

In addition to examining the nature of fat shaming and thin privilege, *Act Two* of *Fattitude* also looks at diet culture, which is defined simply by the *Women's Encyclopedia of Folklore and Folklife* as "all the customs and practices associated with losing or attempting to lose weight" (Vaughan 129). However, from my perspective diet culture can be perceived as something more devious and controlling. I'd define diet culture as the cultural climate that normalizes, markets, and profits from packaged starvation strategies based in the imposition of a culturally defined ideal body type. Finally, *Act Two* is concerned with the notion of an "obesity epidemic," and the statistics that underscore the idea that weight bias is a legitimate civil rights issue and should be legislated as such.

The final act of the film—Act Three— is focused on real life solutions—noting that fat discrimination can end and showing examples of fat positive representations produced by both grassroots activists and mainstream media, such as the show *Mad Fat Diary* and the activist work of Jes Baker, a.k.a *The Militant Baker*.

It is worth mentioning that *Fattitude* is the first expository film made by body image activists that seeks to educate and raise awareness in the mainstream populace about fatness as a social justice issue. It's the first film to make the argument that fat hatred exists as a cultural prejudice and a civil rights issue. Currently, there exists no film that examines the correlation of fat hatred, fat representation and fat civil rights, an issue that affects not only fat people but also anyone who hates his or her body or anyone who may someday become fat. The idea to create this film originated from my previous

scholarly research about fat representation in teen media and a clear gap in the canon of social justice films about body positivity and fat activism.

Furthermore, while *Fattitude* is not the first film to be created by a fat activist, it is one of very few that have looked to fit the mainstream documentary mold: a 90-minute film seeking mainstream distribution. It is also perhaps the first truly expository/educational film seeking to educate and raise awareness. It's the first film to make the argument that fat hatred exists as a culturally acceptable prejudice, and it is for this reason that we need to understand and embrace fat acceptance and activism. Other fat activist documentaries tend to focus on autobiographical/biographical self-acceptance stories or observational style documentaries that look at organizations that promote fat acceptance. For example, in 2013, Kelli Jean Drinkwater directed *Aquaporko!*, a film that promotes body positivity and self-acceptance by documenting the experiences of a fat femme synchronized swim team in Australia. This film is awesome. It's flirty and fun, and it clearly recognizes that there is another way for fat women to conceptualize their bodies and encourages the viewer to embrace body acceptance. This film takes on the idea that fat women experience oppression, but it does not examine how this oppression is systemic.

There are a handful of these types of films that all rely on different human interest stories to exemplify the fat experience: Julie Wyman created a documentary called *Buoyant* about the Padded Lilies, another fat synchronized swim team, and *Strong!,* a film about Cheryl Haworth, a female Olympic bronze medalist in weightlifting. Margitte Kristjansson directed the *The Fat Body (In)visible*, a 24-minute film which advances fat activist ideas by addressing the experiences of three fat women (one of whom is

Kristjansson), who are trying to live in acceptance when the world constantly tells them to hate their bodies. Dylan Robertson created the *The Size of It* in 2002, which followed four obese women and explored their fat experience without much critical analysis. Faith Pennick directed *Weightless* (2011) an autobiographical film that detailed how scuba diving allowed for Pennick to re-conceptualize her relationship to her body and sported the tagline: "Underwater there is no overweight." All of these films are poignant explorations into the lived experience of the fat body as different or "othered" body, but they are not theoretical in the sense that they do not ask the viewer to understand how fat hatred and phobia are systemically situated and sanctioned.

The *2010* film, *Being Big,* directed by Julian Dahl, attempts to present ideas of fat acceptance, but the film also uses stylistic choices that seem to reinforce fat shaming and affirm acts that promote aspirations of bodily control rather than acceptance. Like previously discussed films, *Being Big* takes an observational stance, but it also includes many expository arguments. The camera follows three fat women who are pursuing bodily acceptance. The first is Linnea Dahl, the director's wife, who undergoes a lap band surgery in Mexico. The second is Rain Sherman, a fat fashion designer who pursues 'clean' eating and exercise. The third woman, Jennifer Jonassen, looks to achieve acceptance by using more "theoretical" tactics. Just to be clear, I have put theoretical in quotation marks because Dahl films Jonassen, a fat performance artist, exploring the dating scene and realizes that there are traditionally attractive men who have an interest in fat women. In addition to following these women, the film features interviews with scholars, doctors and scientists.

Unfortunately, Dahl's argument isn't particularly well informed. They film doesn't seem to have a strong social justice background and therefore doesn't effectively frame fat hatred in the greater picture of a kyriarchal system. For example, Dahl uses footage that frames fat-hate as the "last acceptable" prejudice, which clearly means there is no understanding of systemic social justice, because prejudice and the oppression of many groups is still widely accepted. He also often relies on "chubby chasers" to affirm that fat women are attractive—underscoring the idea that women need to be desired or objectified to be successful. Finally, while Dahl's film engages with a lot of the theory that helps prove/argue that fat people deserve to live lives of equal respect, acceptance and love, the strange and unprofessional style choices repeatedly locate fatness as a fetish. The film uses a lot of digital manipulation of frames: floating or superimposed images, cutout images, and layered images. Many of these images are borderline grotesque, including footage of his wife's laparoscopic surgery. The film underscores a disgust for fatness by the use of repeated extreme close ups of squeezed flesh, fat-phobic background music, and screaming floating figures that ridicule fatness. Many of the scholarly interviews were filmed via Skype so they are small cut-outs in the corner of the screen superimposed over images of garbage or urban settings; the director pulls clips from YouTube videos, such as Joy Nash's "Fat Rant," as evidence. Overall, the film is stylistically overworked—the footage seems to always be active and in a state of montage—so the argument feels frenetic and uncomfortable rather than powerful and in counter to a culture of weight bias.

Fattitude is needed because in the canon of documentary film nothing like it exists. It offers a critical look at the widely held assumption that fat shouldn't exist, or be

worthy of our respect. *Fattitude* is a film that pushes people to recognize the invisibility of thin privilege, in a similar spirit to Peggy Macintosh's "Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege" and its ability to shake readers into awareness of white-privilege.

Locating *Fattitude's* Ideas in an Academic Context

Acknowledging and ending the oppression of fat bodies is the primary objective that *Fattitude* is working towards. *Fattitude* seeks to participate in this goal by making visible the unchecked weight bias that is present in the mainstream media. To do this, we have created a film that critiques this bias and educates viewers about fat activism. That said, one of the primary goals of this document is to explicitly explain *Fattitude's* perspectives on current media and to engage deeply with *Fattitude's* arguments in ways that are not compatible with the cinematic experience.

This document is informed by a feminist understanding of how oppression, privilege and social justice work. My understanding of the notions of oppression and privilege are best defined by feminist scholars Iris M. Young and Peggy McIntosh. In "Five Faces of Oppression," Young explains that "oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms – in short, the normal processes of everyday life" (4). In this context there is a definitive understanding that entire groups of people suffer systemic injustice based on characteristics, which are culturally marginalized. The characteristics that lead to oppressions are varied. A group may be oppressed based on physical attributes, emotional status, health status, sexuality, religion, race, economic or social class – quite literally for any characteristic that is

perceived as less than what the dominate messaging relays as normal or culturally accepted.

In contrast to the oppressed group "there is a group that is *privileged* in relation to that group" (Young 5). In "White Privilege and Male Privilege," McIntosh defines privilege "as an invisible package of unearned assets" that put the privileged group "at an advantage" (1). McIntosh explains that having privilege means that your life is understood as "morally neutral, normal and average," while the oppressed are marginalized as morally questionable, abnormal and deviant (2). McIntosh 's article particularly discusses the nature of white privilege or racial privilege, the privilege of being white in a society that oppresses black and brown people. Still, her ideas are applicable to all dichotomies that oppress some and privilege others. So, for example fat people are an oppressed group because they experience systemic injustice based on their fatness and thin people are a privileged group because they experience unearned systemic benefits based on their thinness. It is also worth mentioning that "group differences cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different respects," meaning that a white fat woman and a black thin woman will experience varied privileges and oppressions based on their unique characteristics (Young 5).

In 2009, New York University Press published *The Fat Studies Reader,* a collection of essays edited by Esther Rothblum and Sandra Solovay. While not the first anthology of essays about the nature of understanding and representing the fat body in Western culture, nor the origin of academic fat studies, this book looked to specifically

solidify "fat studies" as an academic and theoretical field. In their introduction, Solovay and Rothblum define fat studies:

> In the tradition of critical race studies, queer studies, and women's studies, Fat Studies is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma placed on fat and the fat body… Fat Studies requires approaching the construction of fat and fatness with a critical methodology—the same sort of progressive, systematic academic rigor with which we approach negative attitudes and stereotypes about women, queer people, and racial groups. (2)

In the forward to this same book, Marilyn Wann, renowned fat acceptance activist and author of *Fat! So!: Because You Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size,* suggests that fat studies "is defined in part by what it is not," giving examples such as "if you believe that thin is inherently beautiful and fat is obviously ugly, then you are not doing fat studies work…You are instead in the realm of advertising, popular media, or the derivative types of visual art—in other words propaganda" (ix). Wann, Solovay and Rothblum place fat studies—and fatness—in the realm of identity politics, conceptualizing the cultural hatred of fat and fatness as a construct of western media and society. Like the other theoretical branches of identity politics, the goal of fat studies is a conversation that not only defines the existence of an unchecked and unjustified prejudice, but also creates an activist movement and shift in consciousness, which ultimately allows for the realization of social justice.

One of the elements that fat studies scholars have written about is the representations of fat bodies and how they are constructed in opposition to thin bodies.

Unfortunately, when it comes to majority thinking and the most popular media, what we learn about bodies is that thin is beautiful and normal and fat is pathological and bad. There exists a the-thinner-the-better understanding of the metaphoric or symbolic resonance of bodies on the thin/fat continuum; I refer to this idea as thin-thinking. Thin-thinking is my term to describe the dominant viewpoint. From this worldview, thin is an attainable goal for all bodies; really, it is more than a goal. Thin is understood as necessary for life achievement. I've chosen the term 'thin-thinking' because I want to emphasize the thinness, in the sense of flimsiness, of the arguments and perspectives that allow for the belief that fatness should be judged, condemned and persecuted. Thin-thinking is the way that the kyriarchal consciousness understands thin as the opposite of fat, completely dismissing the notion of a continuum.

Thin-thinking is the perspective that coins the phrase, "You can never be too rich or too thin." Thin-thinking dominates the world we live in. The world in which people come out in support of Dara-Lynn Wiess, author of *The Heavy: A Mother, A Daughter, A Diet*—a women who publicly demeans and shames her daughter so she will lose weight. This is our world, where fat is not normal or regular; it is a catastrophic failure or weakness, which must be addressed and corrected. This is the world where fat people must feel tortured buying clothes, embarrassed to put ice cream in their grocery carts, ridiculed in doctor's offices and scared that one day their bodies might end up on the news—headless, jiggling and judged.[4] This is a world where fat is assumed and often is synonymous with poverty. In this world, fat functions as the fulcrum of all that thin-thinking detests or rather as the brutally persecuted sacrifice to our near religious idolatry of the thin body.

Thinness as a symbolic concept or metaphor is understood as representing a plethora of positive things to a modern western perspective, things like moral control, modernity, sophistication, and civilization. This understanding of thinness is rooted to the dualistic construction of the physical body as the marker of humanity's uncivilized "animal" instincts, which need to be controlled by the civilized and sanctimonious mind. As Bordo explains in *Unbearable Weight,* one of the common "images in Western philosophy [is the] body as animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prison of the soul and confounder of its projects" (4). In this context thinness becomes symbolic of the denial of animalistic behavior—the physical incantation of a modern, industrialized state of control. Literally, "the size and shape of the body have come to operate as a market of personal, internal order (or disorder)—as a symbol for the emotional, moral or spiritual state of the individual" (Bordo 193). The thin body is understood as the matured, wrangled or trained body—broken by the mind, like a tamed wild horse, ready to ride. In contrast, the fat body is understood as the body out of control, the outward markings of a person's failing spiritual, emotional or moral immaturity and inability to exert their mental will over their physical desire.

This idea of the thin body as spiritually enlightened and fat body as abnormal, abject, and representative of personal moral failure has a long and traceable history linked to the ancient world and the rise of the Abrahamic tradition, which is explicitly documented in Susan E. Hill's *Eating to Excess: The Meaning of Gluttony and the Fat Body in the Ancient World.* Hill explains that in the first century AD, as Christianity surged, "gluttonous behavior begins to take on the character of sinfulness and shame" and eventually, in the writings of John Chrysostom, an influential first century Christian

clergyman, "the fat body begins to be seen…as possible evidence of the soul's disgrace" (Hill 120). It is also around this time period that gluttony is acknowledged as one of the "particularly undesirable acts for the faithful Christian," i.e. one of the seven deadly sins, and linked to the "irrational pursuit of physical pleasures that emphasize bodily and not spiritual interests" (Hill 121-22). In this historical context, the thin body first becomes emblematic of moral superiority.

Fast forward to a burgeoning American future, and watch how little we progress! Repeatedly, thin continues to equate to morally sound. In "The Inner Corset: A Brief History of Fat in the United States" scholar Laura Fraser discusses the 18th century and explains that "in American culture… indulging the body and its appetites was immoral, and that denying the flesh was a sure way to become closer to god. Puritans such as minister Cotton Mather frequently fasted to prove their worthiness and cleanse themselves of their sins" (Fraser 13). In her book, *What's Wrong With Fat,* sociologist Abigail C. Saguy explains that "by the twentieth century, a slender body provided an important way for Americans, to demonstrate not only their wealth and status but also their moral virtue" (41). She further notes that "in the United States, where there is a deep-seated cultural belief in self-reliance, body size [is] especially likely to be regarded as under personal control and reflecting moral fiber" (41).

This idea of thinness as pinnacle or proof of morality is used throughout the development of western civilization to justify and legitimize certain bodies. Historian Amy Erdman Farrell's book, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture,* which documents, examines, and critiques American culture's denigration and stigmatization of the fat body, details extensively how the racist mentality associated with

colonization and "nineteenth century thinking about the 'natural' evolution of the human races into stages of civilization meant not just the complex articulation of racial, gender and sexual hierarchies but also the construction of certain body types as superior" (60). Particularly, Farrell tells us that evolutionary scientists perceived "fat as "not white" because fat "was already linked to the typographies and detailed descriptions of those designated as 'inferior,'" or sinful, such as the bodies colonized Africans like Sarah Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus (60). Farrell explains that in the early 19th and 20th century:

> Fat became clearly identified as the physical trait that marked its bearers as people lower on the evolutionary and racial scale—Africans, 'native' peoples, immigrants, criminals and prostitutes. All women were also considered to be more at risk of fatness, another sign of their status lower on the evolutionary scale than men. Thin, in contrast, became identified as a physical trait marking those who were higher on the evolutionary scale—aristocrats, white people, and men. Fatness then served as yet another attribute demarcating the divide between civilization and primitive cultures, whiteness and blackness, good and bad. (64)

This understanding of the thin body as symbolically linked to a heightened morality seeps and corrodes, spreading like a disease, until it is being used to defend a Eurocentric or Western prejudice, which recognizes Western culture and Western standards of behavior as king (word choice intended on so many levels.) So, because "fat denigration was linked to the overall processes of mapping political and social hierarchies onto bodies," and to the "construction of hierarchies of race, sexuality, gender and class," the thin body

symbolically persists as emblematic of a patriarchal idea of "superior quality: European-American, white, closest to the divine" (Farrell 19, 118).

Fat activists of varying perspectives have spent the last fifty some years trying to shift these cultural understandings of the fat body. I think it is fair to refer to any efforts that look to discourage the dominance of thin-thinking as part of the movement for fat-acceptance. Since the 1960s the movement for ending fat prejudice has been motivated and enacted by organizations such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and the Association for Size Diversity and Health, as well as many individual fat-activist and fat-studies academics. The perspectives and dynamics of these movements' thinkers are varied, but the ultimate goal seems to be the same: The achievement of social justice for the fat body. In her detailed exposition of fat hatred, the rise of fat activism, and the need for fat acceptance, *Fat and Proud: The Politics of Size,* Charlotte Cooper writes that "fat rights activists believe that fat is something that is normal, part of a continuum of body sizes, and that [fat people's] positioning in many societies as deviant says a lot about cultural beliefs. Therefore, as a group that is marginalized as 'other,' fat people have relevancy and value," or, if you will, the essence of fat acceptance is fat people's freedom from stigmatization, which should enable their access to equality and empowerment (13). Achieving this state of equality means changing the perception associated with the fat body—or rather exposing the false nature of the idea that the fat body is unnatural, abnormal and immoral. [5,6]

Farrell attributes the origins of the fat-acceptance movement to the "late 1960's" and notes that "fat activism" arose at the same time as other movements tied to identity politics, such as the "gay liberation movement, the second wave of feminism, the welfare

rights movement, the student and anti-war movements and the black power, Chicano, and Native American movements" (140). Like these other groups, fat activists "identified and challenged the oppressions they faced" (Farell 140). In particular, fat activists have looked to dispel this incorrect cultural conception of the fat body by exposing the false promises of the diet industry, the flawed prejudicial science of the medical community and the thin-thinking representational propaganda created by the mainstream media (Kolata, 2007; Glasser, 1996; Fraser, 1997; McMichael, 2012; Oliver, 2006; Gilman, 2006; and Murray, 2008 Schoenfielder and Wieser 1983; Rothblum and Solovay, 2011; Wann, 1998; Cooper, 1998; Bovey, 1989; and Thone, 1997).

As I've mentioned before, *Fattitude* takes on the work of fat studies and fat activism by examining representations of how popular culture perpetuates thin-thinking, all the brutal and negative treatment that fat people experience, and then underscores the hard truth that all people no matter what size deserve fair treatment. This document provides the reader some insight into the process of making *Fattitude,* and then delves into the heart of *Fattitude's* overall argument by examining the problem of fat-shaming media from an academic standpoint, considering the nature of up-and-coming media that presents itself as body positive, and finally situating *Fattitude* as a socially conscious form of media seeking to raise awareness.

The first chapter, "The Filmmaking Process: *Fattitude* from Origin to Post-Production," explores *Fattitude's* production and post-production journey from the origins of the idea to festival submission. In these pages you will find tables that provide details about all of *Fattitude's* interviewees, an explanation of our fundraising strategy, and an understanding of the choices we made regarding the structure and design of

Fattitude. This chapter also details the losses of the editing process and reviews the footage that was worthy but discarded. When you only have ninety minutes, there are really interesting issues that you just don't have time to cover. For example, in the interviews for *Fattitude*, many people discussed the notion of vanity sizing and the realities of plus size fashion. Unfortunately, despite its interesting nature, a discussion of vanity sizing did not serve *Fattitude's* overall goal. Footage that didn't serve *Fattitude's* overall goal found itself on the cutting room floor.

Chapter Two, "Stereotypes, Pathology and Dysfunction: Understanding Representations of Fat Bodies in the Mainstream Media," considers the basic way that stereotype and assumptions about fat people foster prejudice. This chapter begins by looking at the nature of the stereotype as an oppressive construct and then considers the complexity of consistently representing fatness as symbolic of dysfunction or disease. Here, like in all of *Fattitude*, considerations of media representations are at the forefront of the conversation. This chapter uses examples from *Wall-E, Precious, Pitch Perfect II, Huge, The Biggest Loser* and the visual cliché of fat people eating high calorie foods that is often used on the news and in documentaries.

Chapter Three, "Monsters, Fools and Sexual Deviants: Fat Tropes as Examples of Oppressive Media" is an examination of the fat-hating tropes and metaphors that proliferate popular culture. In particular, the chapter discusses fatness cast as monstrous or villainous, fatness cast as fool, fatness negatively rendered as examples of gender deviance or sexually undesirable. While these ideas are all detailed in the film, the goal here is to contextualize the film's points within the context of academic social justice and the study of how popular representations reflect bias cultural ideas and stigma. For

example, the chapter discusses how the monster is often metaphorically representative of human behaviors or characteristics that society repels or seeks to repress, so when we see fatness represented as monstrous, we know that fatness is culturally akin to other attributes that theorists have discussed as monstrous and therefor socially unsanctioned. In many ways, this chapter looks to position and categorize cultural representations of fatness under the umbrella of that which is understood as oppressive media.

Chapter Four, "Attempting to Overcome Thin-Thinking: Contemporary Fat Positive Representations" looks at what *Fattitude* understands as fat-positive or body-positive media, which in the past was most often produced by indie or grassroots fat activism and media-making but recently has begun to make its way into the mainstream marketplace. In particular, this chapter divides solution oriented media using a three-pronged framework which defines fat activist solutions as linked to beauty, health or civil rights, that was developed by fat studies scholar and sociologist, Abigail Saguy in her book *What's Wrong with Fat*? The chapter uses this framework because Saguy rightly perceives that fat people are seeking cultural acceptance in three veins—they want to be beautiful, they want to be understood as healthy or health conscious, and/or they want respect and equality. And so, activists and indie media makers are creating stuff that responds to these desires.

In the final chapter I detail how *Fattitude* is throwing itself into this larger discourse by presenting as fat-positive media that is attempting to change minds about fat peoples' realities. This chapter concerns itself with *Fattitude's* process by reviewing the brand-building process. *Fattitude* is conscious. Every decision made during the creation of the film was conscious of the need to focus on the goal of social justice and fat civil

rights. This chapter explains those details by examining the choices made with regard to the logo and other branding materials, engaging with the struggle to carve out and establish an audience for the film using social media and other internet resources, and detailing the experience of finding an audience for the film. In many ways, this chapter is also a conversation about the complex nature of moving from theory into praxis. Making a film is one thing: getting the film seen and heard is a whole other ball game.

If someone were to ask me to describe *Fattitude*, I'd say it was a movie that had two intentions: First, to show how popular culture perpetuates a cultural climate that renders fatness and fat people as beings unworthy or undeserving of cultural respect, and second, to document those who are speaking up and creating counter media that inspires others to not only join this movement but also to embrace their absolute right to body acceptance. In many ways this document mirrors that intention.

So, without further ado, Viva La *Fattitude*!

The Filmmaking Process: *Fattitude* from Origin to Post-Production

Fattitude wasn't a lark, but in the beginning it was more dream than reality. How many times in your life have you tossed around an idea with a friend, imagined a book you want to write, or a business you could start together? Viridiana Lieberman and I wanted to make a movie. On nights when we hung out and shared a bottle of wine, there were a lot of movies we invented, all feminist and concerned with changing oppressive media representations. Some of our film ideas were fiction-based and some, like *Fattitude,* were concerned with documenting reality. But the vast majority were just fleeting thoughts, the spirited flights of fancy inspired by the late night musings of good friends.

In the spring of 2013, there was a weird convergence in my life. I was working on my original dissertation idea—representations of fat female bodies in media targeting teens—and I was adrift. While I found my research interesting, I couldn't help but feel like the work I was doing—work about how representations perpetuated fat oppression—needed to reach a much larger audience than my dissertation ever would. Second, I applied for a job as a professor at the local community college. It was a really unusual year and there were multiple openings in the English department. I thought I was a shoo-in. My credentials met the requirements; I had been teaching there as an adjunct for more than ten years, and I was loved by students and peers alike. Honestly, I had kind of figured that working at that community college was my future. I'd pictured it and felt it was what I wanted for myself.

And then I didn't get the job. I asked why so that I could be better prepared the next time there was an opening. The answer surprised me. The hiring committee thought I was a great teacher— interesting and talented—but they wanted only people with English degrees in their English department, and despite the fact that most of my coursework was completed in English departments, they didn't like that my degree was in comparative studies. I couldn't fix that without a complete academic do-over.

To say the least, I felt lost, like I needed a new purpose. So, I did what most people do when the feel lost; I called one of my closest friends—Viridiana—to complain. She said I needed to find something new—something to inspire me. I said, "What do you think about making a movie about fat bodies and media representation?" As usual we batted the idea around, and it sounded great, but I don't think either or us knew that I was going to take action. And then I did.

Because of the research I was doing, I was connected to the fat activist community. I was friends on social media with fat activists and people doing research about fat bodies, and if there were activists that I didn't know, the Internet set me up to contact them pretty easily. Viridiana lived in Brooklyn and I was going to New York to visit family in June, so sent out some emails to people in New York's fat positive community to see if they might be interested in meeting with us. Here is what I wrote to Substantia Jones:

> Good Afternoon Ms. Jones!
>
> My name is Lindsey Averill. I am a PhD candidate at Florida Atlantic University and a Women's and Fat Studies scholar. My very close friend, fellow scholar, and filmmaker, Viridiana Leiberman and I are planning a documentary about the

reality of fat-stigma in US culture and popular media, and we would like to interview you this summer. We will be conducting interviews in NY on June 19th, 22nd and 23rd. Do you think that this would be a possibility for you? Also, if participating in our project would be a possibility for you - which day would work best? Right now this is a small project but we have lofty goals and we would love to feature your voice and you work.

Thank you for your time,

Lindsey Averill

I only wrote to three people, and two of them agreed to be interviewed: Substantia Jones, founder of the photo activist project *Adipositivity,* and Claire Mysko, CEO of the National Eating Disorders Association. I wish I could say that at that point I had bought into the idea that we were doing a significant thing, but until these two women were in the chair in front of the camera, *Fattitude* was still shapeless—would it be a short? A feature? A series of shorts for educators to use? Would it be something we started and never finished? It was all uncertain, the amorphous idea of a film that inspired us. But when these two women started answering my questions, I knew. We both knew; the film Viridiana and I had thought about maybe making someday had begun.

Production

Fattitude is a passion project with a tiny budget. Viridiana and I are the entirety of *Fattitude's* production crew. We share the responsibility of creating *Fattitude,* and in many ways, the division of our labor is based on our skillsets. During production, it was my responsibility to find and research our interviewees, prep our interviews, conduct our interviews and manage all the producer elements, including outreach, scheduling

fundraising, marketing and PR. Viridiana managed all the film-making elements of production. She was our director of photography, our camerawoman, and our lighting and sound crew.

Those first two interviews were conducted using a friend's lighting kit and an outdated camera that Viridiana owned. There were no studios or sets. When we interviewed Substantia Jones, we borrowed a friend's office. Claire Mysko was interviewed in Viridiana's apartment.

High on the content of our first two interviews, we needed more. In November 2013, my husband Randy Harden had a real estate convention in San Francisco. Northern California is a hotspot for fat activism, so Randy and I fronted *Fattitude's* seed money, a few thousand dollars, which paid to fly Viridiana and me out to San Francisco so we could use Randy's hotel room and other donated locations to film twelve additional interviews: Deb Burgard, Dianne Budd, Linda Bacon, Elizabeth Scott, Lynne Gerber, Kjerstin Gruys, Lisa Tealer, Magnoliah Black, Shiela Addison, Marilyn Wann, Sonya Renee Taylor and Virgie Tovar. We call these interviews—plus the two in New York—the original fourteen.

The original fourteen are all outspoken activists and or advocates in the fight for fat acceptance, but when it came to the west coast interviews, Marilyn Wann was the first person I reached out to. Her work was inspiring to me from early on in my foray in the world of fat studies. Wann, a Stanford graduate, is the author of *Fat! So? Because You Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size.* The book is a fleshed out version of a 'zine that Wann published in the 90s. Wann explains that people create 'zines "for the same reason Thomas Paine was inspired to write *Common Sense*—they have an urgent desire to take a

stand on a major issue of the day," in Wann's case fat oppression (10). Through personal experience, Wann learned that you can be smart, well traveled, interesting and a whole slew of other positive things, but if you're fat none of that matters. She explains, "that being fat outweighed everything else about" her (9). Wann has been a leader in the fat activist movement since the publication of her 'zine and the subsequent book.

From my first moments on the phone with her, Wann bought into the work that *Fattitude* was attempting to accomplish and wanted to help us in any way she could. She allowed me to use her name when I contacted the other interviewees we were interested in working with in the Bay Area. Wann also reviewed the list of people I was looking to speak to and made incredible suggestions of people I wouldn't have found myself, like Shiela Addison who is more practicing psychologist than published activist—more praxis than theory—so discovering her would have been difficult. And Sonya Renee Taylor, who is a spoken word poet and founder of *The Body is Not an Apology*, a online magazine that creates radical body positive content about body acceptance of all kinds.

Unlike the interviews in New York, I focused the interviews in the Bay area around a practical goal. If we were going to make the film, then we needed to raise money. Since we weren't connected to any of the traditional Hollywood resources, crowdfunding for money was the option available to us. What this meant was that the interviews that we were conducting in the Bay area, plus the two New York interviews, had to give us enough fodder to make an interesting teaser for our film. Since our film was going to be about popular media representations of fat people, we needed good coverage of people thinking about and analyzing media, considering ideas like gender, race and economics. We also needed voices to address health as a factor in fat activism

because health concerns—no matter whether they are warranted or unwarranted—are always the first opposition to fat acceptance. From an intersectional feminist standpoint, we also wanted a diverse selection of interviews. The original fourteen accomplished those goals. In the group that I put together for the Bay-area interviews there were academic theorists, psychologists, activists, and a doctor who specialized in endocrinology and metabolism. Here are the details of the original fourteen:

Interviewee	Profession/Accolades	Education	Gender, Ethnicity Sexual Orientation
Deb Burgard	Psychologist, Co-founder Health at Every Size Model, Member NAAFA's Advisory Board	Ph.D. Wright Institute, Berkeley	Female, Caucasian, Lesbian
Dianne Budd	Physician, Endocrinology & Metabolism	MD. Mount Sinai School of Medicine NYU	Female, Caucasian, Not disclosed
Claire Mysko	CEO, National Eating Disorders Association	MA, New School for Social Research (Gender Studies)	Female, Caucasian, heterosexual
Elizabeth Scott	Psychotherapist, Co-founder The Body Positive	LCSW, San Francisco University	Female, Caucasian, Not disclosed
Kjerstin Gruys	Thinking Matters Fellow, Stanford University, Author *Mirror Mirror Off the Wall*	Ph.D. (Sociology) UCLA	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Linda Bacon	Health Professor, Author, *Body Respect* and *Heath at Every Size*	Ph.D. (Physiology) UC-Davis	Female, Caucasian, Lesbian
Lisa Tealer	Board Member and Director of Programs at National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance	Not disclosed	Female, African-American, Not disclosed

Lynne Gerber	Visiting Scholar, Women's Studies in Religion Harvard Divinity School, Author, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow*	PhD. UC-Berkley	Female, Caucasian, Not disclosed
Magnoliah Black	Burlesque Dancer, Fat Activist	Not disclosed	Female, African-American, Queer
Marilyn Wann	Fat Activist, Author Fat! So?	M.A. Stanford University	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Sheila Addison	Therapist, Fat Activist	Ph. D. (Family Therapy) Syracuse	Female, Caucasian, Not disclosed
Sonya Renee Taylor	Founder, *The Body is Not an Apology*	Not disclosed	Female, African-American, Queer
Substantia Jones	Photo Activist, Creator, Adipositivity	Not disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Not disclosed
Virgie Tovar	Fat Activist, Author, Hot and Heavy: Fierce Fat Girls on Life, Love and Fashion	M.A. (Human Sexuality) UC-Berkley	Female, Latinx, Queer

Fattitude's First Fourteen Interviewees

While the original fourteen presented a diversity of voices in terms of race and sexuality, gender presented an issue. All fourteen were women. While as a feminist I wanted to strongly represent women's voices and believe that fat oppression has a direct and intense effect on women, I am also well aware that fat oppression affects men and that there are intersectional nuances to investigate. For example, gay men seemed to experience body image issues and fat oppression in an objective context, like women. Ultimately, *Fattitude's* first trailer suffered from a lack of male voices. At the time, my search for male voices came up empty; and, in general, finding male activists or scholars that were considering the ideas relevant to *Fattitude* was hard work because very few men are doing work related to fat acceptance, so it was a struggle to locate and connect

with men who were having conversations of this nature.

During this first round of interviews, I approached each interview with the same set of questions:

1. Tell us who you are and what you do...
2. How would you personally define the word “fat” and how do you think that your definition either is in line with the mainstream definition or in contrast to the mainstream definition?
3. How do you feel about the fact that they just made obesity a disease?
4. What oppressions do fatties face?
5. How you think ideas about body image are tied to media representations?
6. How do we portray fat in the media?
7. What are the fat stereotypes we see in popular culture? Are there examples from pop culture that you perceive as negative - positive?
8. in popular culture are their variations with regard to weight stigma when it comes to race? sex? class? religion?
9. I'm going to name some media events or cultural concepts and I'd love for you to comment:
    - Michelle Obama/Regina Benjamin
    - Headless fatties/news media
    - Photoshopping
    - Georgia's childhood obesity ads
    - Abercrombie and Fitch
    - The Little Mermaid

- Romantic relationships
- Fat jokesters like Chris Farley, Melissa McCarthy, Rebel Wilson
- Huge
- Wall-E
- Drop Dead Diva
- Rosanne
- Mike and Molly
- Miss Piggy
- Fatkini
- Biggest Loser

10. How can we change how fat gets perceived?
11. What is the relationship between health and fatness?
12. What does a body positive or fat utopia look like?

Even though the questions were the same, I allowed the interviews to progress organically, so if an interviewee said something interesting I asked off-script questions in response to the interviewee's statements. I chose to keep the questions consistent because originally I was thinking of the interview process like a scientific experiment or a study—thinking that by limiting the variables I could process the data more eloquently.

Ultimately, this method of asking each interviewee the same questions proved less than adequate. First, by not tweaking the questions I was often failing to focus on the interviewee's specialization, and while in the moment I would realize that and self-correct, it was still an obvious issue. Second, each interviewee offered the opportunity to explore different goals. For example, when speaking to Dianne Budd, M.D., my goal was

to explore the relationships between health, fitness, medical/social policy and fatness, whereas when speaking to Virgie Tovar, an activist and cultural critic, my goals were to explore fat oppression and media representations of fatness as well as questions of sexuality and race in the context of fatness. That said, the interviews that I conducted for *Fattitude* were not formal question and answer interviews; they were more like casual conversations. Most of the time, it was just the interviewee, Viridiana and I in the space and while I would steer the conversation—the intention was to organically learn what the interviewee had to tell us. So, in the end each interview is completely unique in its trajectory and in the information the interviewee provided us.

With these interviews in hand, Viridiana and I returned home and went to work on reviewing and re-reviewing the interview footage with the intention of cutting a teaser for our fundraising campaign on Kickstarter. Together, we discussed what the focal points of the teaser should be. We identified moments from our interviews that really blew us away in terms of clarifying the points we wanted to make about how media representations contribute to fat oppression. We also realized that we needed to highlight some of the basic ideas of fat acceptance because our average viewer was most likely unfamiliar with the topic. Basically, this teaser was the moment when the thesis of *Fattitude* came to fruition. It was always clear that we were going to discuss media representations of fat people—but it was at this point that we realized that *Fattitude* would serve as an introduction to the ideas of fat oppression and fat civil rights for many of our viewers, and so, the argument we were making became clear: media representations of fat people contribute to their oppression, and therefore media representations can contribute to shifting culture towards fat empowerment.

While Viridiana headed into her editing cave to cut the Kickstarter teaser using the editing software *Avid*, I worked on organizing the other details of our Kickstarter. I contacted all of our interviewees to encourage their participation in our crowdfunding and to solicit possible rewards for our backers. I developed a shoestring film budget, including post-production costs like sound editing, color correction, a composer and a motion graphics designer. After crunching the numbers, the goal we set was $38,050, which seemed lofty at the time. I put together a marketing strategy for the Kickstarter, which entailed reaching out to bloggers and influencers in the fat activist and eating disorder awareness communities as well as making contact via social media with over a thousand followers of these communities. Finally, I wrote the copy for the *Fattitude's* Kickstarter—which read:

> Did you know that fat people are paid $1.25 less an hour than their thin counterparts? Or that a fat person who excels can still legally lose a job just because s/he's fat? How about the reality that 1 in 3 doctors associate fat bodies with hostility, dishonesty and poor hygiene? **Fat people are subject to discrimination everywhere they look.** In children's books and stories fat people are villains and bad guys. On our television screens and in the advertising world the fat body is a joke. Magazines and entertainment news shows fixate on the "fatness" of celebrities' bodies and there are very few films that feature fat leads, despite the fact that 60%+ of Americans are—or at the very least consider themselves—fat. We are making a feature-length independent documentary that exposes how fat hatred permeates our popular culture, spreading the message that fat is bad

and in turn forwarding the idea that being cruel, unkind or downright unjust to a fat person is acceptable behavior. As you can tell from our trailer, our film is already in production. We're here on Kickstarter because we need your help to complete our film!

WHY WE ARE MAKING THIS FILM? We feel that most people are ill-informed when it comes to fatness. We want to offer a counter argument to the current popular notions that condemn fatness in all forms, an argument that overturns notions of fat hatred in favor of body acceptance. The media and other cultural sources say that people need to lose weight—that obesity is a deadly epidemic, but there is scientific research that shows that weight loss and health are not linked like we think they are. For example, according to ASDAH, "Weight and BMI are poor predictors of disease and longevity. The bulk of epidemiological evidence suggests that five pounds 'underweight' is more dangerous than 75 pounds 'overweight.'"

OUR GOALS FOR THE FILM This is a film that looks to educate and activate. It is our goal to inform people about the harsh and very real realities of fat shaming and fat hatred. We also hope to inspire people to speak out about the prejudice they face or the mistreatment of others. While we know that the content of our film will work well in educational environments and expect to promote the film in that context, our real goal is to make the general public more aware of the prejudice that fat people experience. With this in mind, we will be pursuing mainstream

distribution for our film and submitting the film to mainstream film festivals.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE... We set out to make this film because we hated the way fat men and women were treated. We hated that fat people had to feel shame and that they were constantly at the butt end of jokes or assumed to be lazy, dirty or lacking will power. We hated that so many people felt trapped in their amazing bodies and we wanted young people to feel powerful and passionate no matter what size they were. We are still making this film for all these reasons, but in the process of production we have come to realize that this film is also about our personal journeys. The interviews we have conducted have pushed us to evolve our own views about fat-hatred and fat-shame and although we thought of ourselves as preachers of body acceptance before this process began, we were admittedly suffering from a nagging inability to shake off the lingering whispers of our own self-consciousness. Each day that we work on this film the self-critical whispers lose ground. Body acceptance is a war—it's you against the cacophony of noise incessantly clamoring that nothing about your body will ever be good enough. What we're learning through the process of making this film is that like any other war, winning this one requires that you enlist other strong voices and fighters**. We are so thankful for those who fight body hatred alongside us, and we look forward to seeing you join the fight.**

We launched the Kickstarter on April 15th, 2014 and in our very first day we

raised over a thousand dollars. By day five we were under attack, internet trolls. To be honest, Viridiana and I were expecting some trolling. The fat acceptance community sees a significant amount of trolling in general. We expected comments on our Kickstarter that scolded us for promoting obesity or people who told us to put down our doughnuts and go exercise. However, we were naive to how truly brutal internet trolls could be. We felt well-equipped to handle playground bully types on our Twitter feeds, but we were not equipped for the real world violent threat towards us, our families, our interviewees and our Kickstarter backers.

Our internet troll story isn't unusual. Other feminists who have taken to crowdfunding have experienced the backlash of trolls, for example Anita Sarkeesian the founder of *feminist frequency*, a website where she creates and publishes short videos that analyze representations of women in the media, particularly in video games. Like Sarkeesian, Viridiana and I were harassed both online and at our homes. We were doxxed—meaning our personal information was published on the internet along with instructions to harass us. We received both death and rape threats. Our initial reaction to this hatred was to feel scared and retreat behind locked doors, but after about twenty-four hours it became clear to me that I didn't want to be silenced, that the vitriol coming my way was exactly why I was making *Fattitude.* I called the local news stations. I didn't know if they would be interested in a story about a couple of local filmmakers being harassed for making a film about fat oppression, but I figured it was worth a shot.

By the end of the week, WPBF25, the ABC affiliate in West Palm Beach, ran the story and I wrote a first-person account of our trolling experience for *xojane.com*. In many ways, WPBF's coverage and the *xojane.com* article were the beginning of

Fattitude's media journey, which has included a story on the cover of the *Sun Sentinel,* appearances on *The Dr. Oz Show, NPR,* and *News24 South Africa,* features in *Haaretz, The Huffington Post, Cosmopolitan, El Pais, Bustle, Daily Mail, Buzzfeed, Salon.com* and others. In the beginning, the media coverage was about being trolled, but eventually the focus changed and the interviews began to examine *Fattitude's* mission. In the end, the actions of the Internet trolls made it easier for us to get the word out. People were shocked by the brutality that was directed at Viridiana and I, and it helped backers realize that *Fattiude's* mission was important. We reached our Kickstarter goal in less than half the allotted time, and ultimately raised $44,140.

With our new-found clout and funds, the first goal was a second round of interviews. While we were still interested in interviewing activists, academics and theorists—or what we called *frameмakers* our focus for this round of interviews was on the people we called *creators*. These two words are the terminology we developed to discuss our interviewees. *Frameмakers* were the academic types who analyzed and deconstructed the importance of media representations and identified the cultural significance of fatness. *Creators* were those who were or had been part of making media representation that engaged with fat bodies As I see it, *creators* come in two categories: grassroots and mainstream. The fat-positive grassroots creators were generally of social media fame: bloggers and Instagram stars, such as *The Militant Baker* (Jes Baker) and *GarnerStyle* (Chasitity Garner). Many of the grassroots creators were familiar with *Fattitude* from our Kickstarter campaign. So they were eager to participate.

Getting the attention of mainstream creators was more of a rigmarole. As an academic, I approached this like any other task—with research. I used the *Internet Movie*

Database to create a contact list for any Hollywood types that seemed interested in body image, body positivity, or fat rights. I wrote letters and made phone calls hoping to find interested parties. I reached out to my own network to see if anyone had connections to the people I was looking to contact. Ultimately, I found that the gatekeepers in Hollywood were pretty good at their jobs. I was able to make contact with three people via the professional route: Winnie Holzman and Savannah Dooley, the creators of the *ABC Family* television series *Huge;* and Ash Christian, the director of *Fat Girls,* an award-winning indie film that correlates experiences of fat women and gay men. Christian was straightforward. I spoke to his manager; she got in touch with him, and he agreed to be interviewed. Winnie Holzman and Savannah Dooley required some creative thinking. These two are mother and daughter. After much research, I couldn't seem to isolate contact information for them, but I could find info for the third member of their family—actor Paul Dooley, so I contacted his team to see if they would reach out to his wife and daughter for me. Holzman and Dooley had actively considered the fat acceptance movement during their creation of the television series, so they were very interested in interviewing. All our other Hollywood-type interviews—Howard Murray (sitcom director), Ricki Lake (actress and producer), Judith Drake (actor), Celia Finkelstein (actor, director, and writer), and Guy Branum, (writer and comedian)—were friends, friends of friends, or connections we made without using traditional pathways like public relations firms.

Besides Hollywood, another mainstream media category that we explored for *creators* was plus-size fashion and modeling. While I personally struggle with fashion representations because of their history of objectifying women, plus-size fashion houses

and models are visible participants in the body-positive movement. I lined up an interview with ModCloth's CEO, Susan Koger because her brand has come out against using Photoshop and has a clear vision for diversity in plus-size clothes, but unfortunately she canceled at the last minute. I also made connections with Tess Holliday and Alex LaRosa, two successful plus-size models who defy the traditional notions of plus model sizing. Most plus size models are actually women who still wear straight sizes. LaRosa wears a size 18 and Holliday was the first size 22 model to get a major modeling contract.

In addition to interviewing mainstream and grassroots creators, for our second round of interviews we were also interested in filling the gap we saw in the original fourteen, male voices. To discover male voices, I reached out to those we had already interviewed and did a lot of online research. My goal was to find men who were participating in the empowerment of fat people by creating industry that included fat people, or by making media that included fat people. I also looked for men who were publicly writing, talking or thinking about male body image and fatness. Admittedly, this part of my interviewee search was complicated and each man we included seemed to fall into my lap rather than come from diligent research. For example, I literally stumbled into Andrew Walen when he and I were interviewed for the same *NPR* article; Guy Branum was a friend of Lindy West's who agreed to interview with us with only twenty-four hours' notice. When all was said and done I was able to line up nine male interviews.

Our second round of interviews began with Rebecca Puhl in New Haven, Connecticut on September 2, 2014 at Yale University, where the *RUDD Center for Food Policy and Obesity* was located at the time. Over the next months, we conducted interviews in Los Angeles, Washington DC, Baltimore, Savannah, Boca Raton, and

Brooklyn. Once again, we used locations that were either our place of residence or loaned to us by friends, family or interviewees. Production of *Fattitude* officially wrapped on December 10, 2015, when we concluded our interview with Kelly Shibari, the first plus-size woman to be featured in *Penthouse*. In total, we interviewed 50 people and we accumulated close to 100 hours of footage. Below you will find a table that provides the details of interviewees who were included in *Fattitude's* second round of interviews.

Interviewee	Profession/Accolades	Education	Gender, Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation
Abigail Saguy	UCLA Professor, Author *What's Wrong With Fat?*	PhD, Princeton University	Female, Caucasian, Not Disclosed
Alex Larosa	Plus-Size Model	BA – Social Justice from Occidental College	Female, African American, Not Disclosed
Andrew Walen	Psychotherapist, CEO of Body Image Therapy, Author, *Man Up to Eating Disorder,* President of the executive board for the National Association for Males with Eating Disorders (NAMED)	LCSW-C, LICSW, CEDS, University of Tennessee	Male, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Ash Christain	Director, *Fat Girls, Emmy Award Winner*	Not Disclosed	Male, Caucasian, Gay male
Bruce Sturgell	Founder, *Chubstr*	Not Disclosed	Male, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Chastity Garner Valentine	Founder, *GarnerStyle* and *CurvyCon*	Not Disclosed	Female, African-American, Not Disclosed
Cheryl Haworth	Olympian, Weightlifting	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Lesbian
Daniel Farr	Lecturer of Sociology Kennesaw State University	Ph.D. (Sociology) and M.A. (Women's Studies) from the	Male, Caucasian, Gay male

		University at Albany, SUNY	
Deah Schwartz	Expressive Arts Therapist, Author, *Dr. Deah's Calmanac*	Ph. D. (Education), University of San Francisco M.S. (Therapeutic Recreation) San Francisco State University	Female, Caucasian, Not Disclosed
Guy Branum	Comedian, Writer, *The Mindy Project, Chelsea Lately, Awkward, Totally Biased with W. Kamau Bell*	B.A. UC-Berkley (Political Science) J.D. University of Minnesota	Male, Caucasian, Gay male
Howard Murray	Director, *Big Bang Theory, Grace Under Fire*	Not Disclosed	Male, Cauasian, Heterosexual
Isabel Foxen Duke	Holistic Health Coach, Founder and Creator of Stop Fighting Food	B.A. (Sociology) Tufts University	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Jackson Katz	Co-founder/Director Mentors in Violence Prevention, Author *Leading Men: Presidential Campaigns and the Politics of Manhood*	Ph. D. (Cultural Studies and Education) UCLA	Male, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Jane Read Martin	Screenwriter, *Beautiful Girl*	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Jeanette DePatie	Founder, *The Fat Chick*	Certified Fitness instructor	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Jeffery Costello and Robert Tagliapietra	Fashion Designers	Not Disclosed	Male, Caucasian, Gay males
Jennifer Pozner	Founder and executive director of Women In Media & News, Author *Reality Bites Back*	Hampshire College	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Jes Baker	Author, *Things No One*	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian,

	Will Tell Fat Girls: A Handbook For Unapologetic Living		Not Disclosed
Judith Drake	Actor, *How I met Your Mother*	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Kai Hibbard	Body Positive Activist and Contestant, *The Biggest Loser*	MA. (Social Work) University of New England B.A (Psychology, Justice and English University of Alaska	Female, Caucasian, Polyamourous
Kelly Shibari	First Plus-Size Woman in *Penthouse*	Not Disclosed	Female, Asian, Bisexual
Kelsey Miller	Senior Features Writer, *Refinery29*, Author *Big Girl*	B.S. Boston University	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Kjerstin Gruys	Thinking Matters Fellow, Stanford University, Author *Mirror, Mirror Off the Wall*	Ph.D. (Sociology) UCLA	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Lindy West	Activist, Co-Sounder Shout Your Abortion, Author, *Shirll*	B.A. Occidental College	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Lizabeth Wesley-Casella	Weight Stigma Prevention Advocate, Founder, *bingebehavior.com*	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Melinda Alexander	Plus-size Stylist	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Melissa Fabello	Body Image Activist and Sexuality Scholar, Editor of *Everyday Feminism*	A.B.D (Human Sexuality Studies) Widener University	Female, Caucasian, Queer
Nicholas Messitte	Freelance Cutural Critic for *Forbes.com*	Not Disclosed	Male, Caucasian, Heterosexual
Pia Shivo-Campo	Founder, *Chronicles of a Mixed Fat Chick*	B.A. University of Maryland	Female, mixed race, Heterosexual

Rajdulari	Jazz Vocalist	Not Disclosed	Female, African-American, Heterosexual
Rebecca Puhl	Deputy Director, UCONN RUDD Center for Food Policy and Obesity	Ph.D (Clinical Phycology) Yale	Female, Caucasian, Not Disclosed
Regan Chastain	Fat Activist, Creator *Dances With Fat*	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Lesbian
Savannah Dooley and Winnie Holzman	Creators, *Huge*	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Queer/Heterosexual
Tess Holliday	Plus Size Cover Model, *People Magazine*	Not Disclosed	Female, Caucasian, Heterosexual

Fattitude's Additional Interviewees

As you can see from the table our second round of interviews accomplished some goals. We were able to add a few great interviews with *framemakers*, like Puhl who gave us statistics on the reality of fat discrimination; and Melissa Fabello, editor of *Everyday Feminism*, who succinctly explained the difference between skinny shaming and fat prejudice. And, we significantly expanded our *creator* list, which prior to our second round of interviews consisted of only burlesque dancer Magnoliah Black. By the time production was finished, the *creator* list included fashion designers, actors, models, directors, bloggers, and the creators of a national television show.

However, in the context of diversity there are still holes in *Fattitude's* lineup, but not for lack of trying. I would have liked to interview more people of Hispanic and Asian descent. Although given a lot of screen time, Virgie Tovar is the lone Hispanic voice in the film; our only Asian interviewee is Shibari. Unfortunately, even though Shibari was very interesting during her interview, our ninety minutes did not leave room for a discussion of fat representation in pornography, so as a final cut *Fattitude* is completely devoid of an Asian perspective. In addition to these limitations, *Fattitude* features no

trans voices and the men we were able to interview do not represent racial diversity at all; they are all Caucasian. Again, having no trans voices and only Caucasian men was not our intention or our goal. We had hoped to interview men of Hispanic, African-American and Asian descent, as well as trans people who were doing fat-positive work. We struggled to find these voices, and geography, scheduling, and financial limitations prevented us from conducting further interviews. Even though we might not have reached our idealistic goals, the spirit of intersectional feminism is well represented by *Fattitude* because many that we did interview are well-versed in the ideas that intersectional feminism represents. Interviewees like Tovar, Taylor and Fabello specifically addressed ideas of inequality based on complex factors of identity – including race, class, sexuality, etc. Viridiana and I made it a point to include these concepts in the film.

Post-Production

Once filming the interviews was complete, *Fattitude* officially moved from the production stage to the post-production stage. That said, Viridiana and I began the shift into post-production prior to completing our filming, sometime around January 2015. We approached *Fattitude* much like we have approached research papers in the past. In this metaphor, the interviews were our research materials and *Fattitude* was the paper we were preparing to write. We had all our interviews transcribed, and we read them and highlighted them, looking for the moments that were the most poignant and the most focused on the goal of exposing how the mainstream media is most often complicit in fat oppression.

In particular, we broke down the interviews by organizing the material in two different ways. First, we made documents that were particular to each interviewee. These

documents included the quotes from each interviewee that we tagged as interesting. Second, after reading the transcripts we brainstormed about topics that we needed to cover in *Fattiude* and then cut and pasted quotes from interviews into files, which were organized by topic. Our topics included fashion, intro to fat acceptance, food and reality television, Hollywood, sports, news media, health, and solutions. In addition to these basic categories, each file was broken down further into sub-categories. The main categories could have any number of sub-categories, for example our Hollywood file included eighteen sub-categories: general, African-American and fat, Hollywood fat, fat as joke, fat suits, gay and fat, hyper/asexual, kids' fairy tales, monsters/villains, sidekicks, tropes, *Babes*, *Drop Dead Diva*, *Huge*, Jabba the Hutt, Miss Piggy, *Precious*, and Ursula. Essentially, we were creating documents that would serve as short cuts for referencing our footage.

Once we had organized, reviewed and re-reviewed the material in our interviews, it was time to start drafting the script. Again, we relied on the skills we developed as graduate students and turned to visual brainstorming. We created note cards with key words, concepts, or scenes that we felt were important to our film. Using sticky tack, we stuck the note cards to the wall in the upstairs loft of my house. Many of the words and phrases on the note cards were the sub-categories we came up with while organizing our interviews.

At first, the note cards were just a cloud of chaos, representing the highlights of our interviews, but over three days of discussion and actual physical movement of the cards, we were able to organize them into the outline for *Fattitude's* script. We divided the script's three acts into four structured categories: Tropes, News Media, Real World

Consequences and Solutions. We were also able to realize that some things just weren't going to make the cut. We relegated these cards to a category we called Sidelined. Finally, it became clear that two of the cards were more guidelines for us than topics that we would flesh out. These two cards remained on the wall under a category that we entitled Home Base. When we were done this is how we had organized the cards:

Home Base
Intersectionality
Gender 101

Tropes

Media	Jabba the Hutt	Babes
Representation	Scooby Doo	Black and Fat
Matters	Invisible (Gay&Fat)	Mammy
Kid's Fairy Tales	Sidekick	Hyper/Asexual
Monster/Villan	Fat as Joke	Melissa McCarthy, Aidy
Hansel & Gretel	SNL	and Rebel
Ursula	True Lies	Miss Piggy

News Media

Beauty	Drop Dead Diva	Diets/Cleanses
Mrs.	History	Oprah
Winterbourne	Economics/Choice (Or	Discrimination is not
Celia Hollywood	lack of)	Healthy
Fat	Rosanne	My Body, My Business
Trapped in a Fat	Diet Culture	Obesity Epidemic
Body	Moralizing Food	The Biggest Loser

Real World Consequences

Obama	Personal Stories	Thin privilege
Weight Bias	– Virgie/Tess	Airplanes
Discrimination	Chris Christie	Weight Loss surgery
Headless Fatties	Plus Size	
Fat Shaming	Clothes	
Skinny Shaming	Men's Fashion	

Solutions

Body Love/Body	Legal	Alternative
Acceptance	Solutions/Laws	Media
Fat as Term	Activism	

Abercrombie and Fitch/Lululemon	Actors/Creators	*My Mad Fat Diary*
Hashtags	*Huge*	Role Models (Cheryl)
Fatkini	*Glee*	Important to All Body Sizes
Models	*Hairspray*	Fat Utopia
Being Visible	Normative	
	Representation	
Sidelined		
Men- Size is Good	Tabloids	Is it easier to be fat and black?
Lindy Pudding	Fat Bodies Can Move	Photoshopping
Reagan's Bear	Dove	Gay and Fat
Diet Ads	Anthems	Big Ballet

Fattitude's Organizational Card Scheme

With this outline in hand—or, rather, on the wall—we returned to the documents that we created to organize the interviews. From these, we were able to slowly piece together a script. During this process we needed to devise a way to enter our material. Very often, documentarians use their own voices to frame the narrative they are relaying to the audience. Either via voice-over or by using actual footage of themselves, they insert their documentary journey—their search for the answer to the question their documentary addresses—into the context of their films. *MissRepresentation,* directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, is a good example of this style of documentary. Newsom's documentary is about the negative and demeaning ways women are represented by the media. Newsome frames this information by giving the viewer her own narrative using her experience as an actress, the roles she was offered and her desire for stronger, more empowered female representation in her daughter's future. While this tactic is accepted, effective, and often personalizes a documentary's narrative, neither Viridiana nor I wanted our narrative personalized to us. We wanted viewers to realize that weight bias affects many, not just us.

After much trial and error, I suggested we accomplished this goal by using voice-over to directly address the viewer. I envisioned an empty space, akin to being adrift in actual space, which would be symbolic of the viewer's mind. Gradually the space would fill with negative imagery while the viewer heard this voice-over:

> This is not the space in your mind. It is not empty. In our mind, there are thousands—if not millions—of images before we even meet anyone. Even now, you came to the movie theater to see *Fattitude* and you have an idea of what you're going to see…it's about fat people. What does that mean? What do you know about fat people? What do you think you know?

Then, there would be a rush of negative images followed by the fade into Substantia Jones saying, "I think fat is conceived as monstrous because we're taught these things from a very early age." We went with this idea. We chose it because we felt showing the viewer the media that forms the assumptions they have about fatness shifted the responsibility of perception to the viewer.

In the initial draft of the script, there were four times that we returned to this black space and voice-over format. Ultimately, we cut two of these sections. The first was at the end of Act 1, after Lindy West says, "The problem is not with Miss Piggy, the problem is with having two choices. Instead of a bajillion choices." Here we had intended to add the following voice-over:

> So many of the fat characters we see that we are presented are negative. And the choices we are given to understand fat people are limited. The characters we see teach us that fat people are repugnant. This leads to a cultural ideal that the fat body isn't beautiful and must be shed.

Our initial intention was to smooth the transition from the discussion of fat tropes to the discussion of fatness and beauty. Once the film was edited, it was clear that this transition was better accomplished using visuals, not audio.

We cut the third voice-over section for the same reason. This voice-over would have occurred right after *Fattitude's* discussion of *The Biggest Loser* and right before our discussion of Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* campaign. Our goal with this voice-over was to try to crystallize the obscure nature of reality television for *Fattitude's* viewers. In the script it was drafted this way:

> We do something in our minds where what we're watching on our TV doesn't require the full attention of our emotional background. Meaning, we don't have to care about the people on reality television, because they're characters. We can pretend that's not a real person, with parents, with a family. But it is a big thing. These are real people. Strangers we've never met before trying to be on a diet. Reality television purports to be real, but ultimately, when you are watching it on television, you don't think of it as real with real consequences. This isn't just a imaginary trope in the abyss of fiction, these are real human beings suffering in their lives because we believe these horrible things about them. So when figures of influence endorse these hateful fictions, they become real.

In this case, as before, the old show-don't-tell adage applied. It quickly became clear that the script could function with just the opening voice-over and the quick return to the black space that occurs right before Act 3, which asks the viewers to clear their minds of the assumptions they have about fat people, so that they can make room for media that is

solution oriented.

Once the script was drafted, next step was all Viridiana. She went home to New York and cut our footage so that we had a video version of the script. At this point, *Fattitude* was almost four hours of back-to-back talking heads, so before we even began to add media clips we spent a few days cutting back repetitious conversations and deciding who said it best. Once we were under three hours we stopped cutting and shifted to considering media.

I'd love to say that our media collecting was super organized, that we cataloged and created archives. In some ways we did, but not in any way that would be understandable to anyone but us. Basically, Viridiana would call or email me and say, "Hey, this week I'm cutting X,Y and Z. Would you please find the media clips that serve as the evidentiary sources for X,Y and Z?" And then, with the help of *Fattitude's* media research interns, Viridiana and I would go looking for X,Y, and Z. We created a whole lot of Google Drive spreadsheets with links and time codes that reference a multitude of media examples of fat representations, but there is no way this could be a resource for anything but *Fattitude*. With the media in hand, Viridiana got to cutting and when she felt she had completed a section she would send it to me to review and we would discuss and tweak it until we were both in agreement that the point the interviewee was making was well detailed and supported with media evidence. Obviously, after adding the media, the film was once again way too long and so we watched and re-watched and watched again snipping and trimming until *Fattitude* was comfortably under ninety minutes, which was our goal length.

Sad story: when you only have ninety minutes, there are really interesting issues

that you don't have time to cover. Most of the *Fattitude* interviews were close to two hours. Each interview is more nuanced, comical, poignant and powerful than the last. There is coverage on so many important issues that are valid and worthy of consideration that still wound up in shreds on the cutting room floor.

During the editing conversation we were constantly referring back to those two cards on our story board marked home base: "Gender 101" and "Intersectionality." The goal when editing *Fattitude* was to explore conversations about fat oppression while keeping feminism and intersectional complexity in mind, without straying from the original intention of discussing representations of fat bodies. Unfortunately, topically there are some very real lived experiences that the mainstream media basically overlooks, for example the experiences of people living queer fat lives. Queer fat lives are invisible to the mainstream media, something *Fattitude* mentions. The queer fat experience deserves all ninety minutes of a film, if not more. But *Fattitude* is a film about mainstream media representation. In other words, when it came to the cutting room floor, it seemed that the axe that wielded the deepest cuts was *Fattitude's* overarching thesis—a focus on deciphering and refuting oppressive representations of fat people in the media.

There are some interesting conversations that came up during the making of *Fattitude* that just don't get fully realized coverage in the film. For example, Andrew Walen, discussed that males with a propensity towards being fat are more likely to engage in eating disorders like exercise bulimia, "a compulsive need to exercise to get rid of calories" (healthline.com) or muscle dysmorphia, which is defined by Pope et al. in their book *The Adonis Complex* as a "syndrome in which boys and men believe they aren't muscular enough" so weight lifting and bulking up becomes a compulsion. (xv).

Unlike women, their goal is to be big and fit. Walen explained to *Fattitude*:

> As I got bigger, later in life and I went through more and more weight cycling, I started to find more and more people appreciated my size. I have big shoulders. I have a strong back, a broad chest. And there is something very masculine about being able to walk through the world and no one is gonna mess with you. I was in a bar in Boston when I was in college and there was a rowdy drunk guy at the bar and I'm at a table and we're listening to some cool band playing some jazz. And this guy is going off and I keep looking at him. And he makes some comment to me, like, "I'm just joking around, ha ha ha." And he slaps me on the back. And it's like, boom, and it just stopped. And he said, "Oh. I better stop. You might know how to fight." That was like the moment where it occurred to me, "Wow, being big. That's the essence of masculinity now. I will not be messed with. I have spent my whole life being terrified and judged and I have been filled with social anxiety and depressive thoughts and being bigger is better…the only time that boys and men are typically talking about body image, is about the desire to be bigger and stronger.

The cultural connection of masculinity to prowess or force and therefor large size—if it knows how to fight and can't be messed with—is some interesting theoretical stuff, from both a gender studies and a fat studies vantage point. Traditionally, when fat activists discuss the male body, the most common discussion is how fatness renders males physically soft. Fat men culturally register as feminine men because they have curves and roundness like women. This is often represented on screen—for example, consider the fat

sitcom dads who are assumed lazy and weak or media references to "man-boobs." Walen seems to be pointing to the idea that large size in men is desired, that sometimes fat men pass as belonging to this space or develop eating and exercise disorder to attempt to strive for this space. Unfortunately, this idea never found its footing within the context of *Fattitude*. Ultimately, because this was a more personal example and Walen was the only voice discussing these ideas, this conversation registered outside of *Fattitude's* representational thesis.

Timing, cultural currency, and powerful coverage are other elements that came into play when deciding what conversations made the cut. For example, when we were filming the interviews for *Fattitude* everyone was talking about Meghan Trainor's song "All About That Bass." If you are unfamiliar with this incredibly catchy summer hit from 2014, it features lyrics like, "Yeah, it's pretty clear, I ain't no size two/But I can shake it, shake it, like I'm supposed to do/'Cause I got that boom boom that all the boys chase/And all the right junk in all the right places" (Trainor). To a fat feminist activist, the implication here is that there is a certain kind of fat-ish body, one bigger than a "size two" that is acceptable on a female because men will find her "right junk" sexually appealing. This song is certainly not feminist because a woman should not define her worth based on a man's approval, but it's also not body positive because it still stipulates that there is only one acceptable fat body, "the one the boys chase."

Despite this half-hearted version of body acceptance, this song was praised as body positive, so I asked our interviewees about it. The goal was to dedicate a segment of time in the film to breaking down these ideas—but it just didn't happen. First of all, even though Trainor won a Grammy, the media's not talking about this song any longer, so the

cultural currency involved in breaking down this song has passed. Secondly, our interviewees were more dismissive of the song than analytical of it, so at the end of the day when looking at the footage, examining and analyzing the song paled in comparison to the conversations captured about Miss Piggy. Will Trainor be something the culture is discussing in twenty years? I'm not sure, but I get the feeling that Miss Piggy and *Star Wars* are pretty timeless. So, bye bye "All About That Bass."

Two other examples of elements that *Fattitude* decided to table based on cultural currency, timing, and power of coverage were how Photoshop twists our perceptions of what real bodies look like, and the social perception that fat black women have it easier than fat white women. Photoshop was a pretty clear elimination. The feeling was that this topic has mainstreamed and there is already movement for change regarding this process. Companies like *ModCloth* have pledged to never Photoshop their images and magazines like *Glamour* and *Seventeen* have pledged to limit their Photoshopping as well. Skipping an onscreen discussion about Photoshopping was about a lack of necessity. This idea has growing exposure. People are starting to get this. It is also not fat-specific. So, even though we had decent coverage of these ideas, the cultural currency on this topic is more been-there-done-that than representative of a shift toward fat positivity.

With regard to the social perception that fat black women have it easier than fat white women—*Fattitude* had a lack of coverage (sort of). The idea that black women have an easier time with fatness is a cultural construct that we see represented in various media artifacts. Examples include Sir Mixalot's *Baby Got Back,* a cult-favorite rap song released in 1992 that focuses on black men's objectification of black female butts, and *Phat Girlz* (2006), a film directed by Nnegest Likké and starring Mo'nique, where the

plot line focuses on a fat black woman learning to accept her body because it is loved by a svelte black man. In these examples, the underlying idea that contributes to the notion that fat black women have it easier than fat white women is a social perception that fat black female bodies are considered beautiful and wanted sexually by men, particularly black men. In other words, a woman's worth and ease in culture is defined by the level of male desire she experiences.

To be clear, beauty standards may vary based on race and culture, but that doesn't equate to an easier experience. In the article "Black Beauty Standards Can Be Just as Unhealthy as White Ones," written for *The Root*, black writer Demetria Lucas D'Oyley explains that the beauty standard of ultimate thinness for white women is different than the standard pursued by black women. D'Oyley notes that "black women have [their] own beauty ideals—ones that emphasize curves in all the "right" places and/or a little more meat on the bones." However, while different, this standard isn't easier to attain and it is "equally as problematic as absolute thinness" (TheRoot.com). According to D'Oyley, "black women go to extreme lengths, risking their health and their lives, to meet an unrealistic body ideal," including the use of illegal silicone or butt injections that promise to make them curvy in a way that is considered sexually appealing (The Root.com).

During the *Fattitude* interview process, when I broached the question, "Do black women have it easier than white women when it comes to the acceptability of their fatness?" with black female interviewees, they scoffed at me or just said, "No." Single word answers when the interviewer is not on camera do not play well. So, a specific lack of directed focus on this question in the final cut of *Fattitude* was a case of poor coverage. I believe that our interviewees stunted reactions were rooted in frustration because the

assumption that it is easier for fat black women is based in a cultural ignorance that arises from both white privilege and the stereotypical depictions that we see of black women in the media. Speaking directly to the size acceptance movement in her *xojane* article, "Why I'm Over The Size Acceptance Movement or Hey, SA, What Have You Done For Me Lately?," writer Cary Webb notes that the fat acceptance movement doesn't unacknowledged the variance of oppressions that are experienced by fat black people, "Fat Black bodies are not read the same way as fat White bodies. They just aren't. Period. And if one more White person tells me that Black people are generally more accepting of fat bodies I will scream. This isn't true and I'm tired of saying so." That said, while *Fattitude* may not explicitly state that black women don't have it easier, the coverage of black women in *Fattitude*—particularly the rich and complicated analysis of the Mammy figure offered by Sonya Renee Taylor —and how our black female interviewees noted their very clear cultural invisibility, relays the reality that fat black women struggle greatly under the pressures that are at the convergence of black and fat oppression.

The final reason that things ended up on the cutting room floor was practicality. You can't do everything, so, as they say in the world of creative writing, sometimes you have to kill your darlings. Let me give you an example (mostly because then this darling of mine gets to be heard here!). In the plotting and scripting of *Fattitude*, it was clear that the subject of choosing heath via dieting/will power had to broached on some level, if for no other reason than to head off a biased dismissal of the film based on the rooted belief that fat cannot be healthy, that fat people are just lazy and unwilling to pursue thinness. Many of our interviewees discussed this, but the best (albeit not succinct) explanation was from Chastain. She said:

I started reading the studies and I read hundreds of studies, and I was so shocked at the end that I went back to read them again to make sure I wasn't wrong about what I understood because what I found was that there wasn't a single study where more than a tiny fraction of people had succeeded long term in weight loss. What happens in studies are that most people are able to lose weight over about six months to a year. Almost everyone gains that weight back within five years, and the majority of people gain back more than they lost. That's what the research clearly shows. There's not a single study that refutes that. Often in studies, even a year success is like two to five pounds which, not for nothing, but I could loofah and lose two pounds right now. Like, I don't need to diet for two years to get that done. Like, Weight Watchers' own studies show that the average Weight Watchers participant loses five pounds in two years and their chief scientist went on TV and said they were very happy to see this validation of what they're doing. Like, she and I have a different definition of validation. And so what happens is, people lose weight in the short term, they gain it back in the long term. The best that we can tell is because there are biological processes that make that happen. Right? So your body doesn't have an understanding that there's a cultural benefit to it being a certain size so if it's hungry and you don't feed it, your body's only understanding is like, 'Oh, there's no food. No problem.' Your body is there to help you out. It's like, 'I got this. I'm going to just store all the food. I'm going to slow down our metabolism. I'm going to flood your body with hunger hormones, right? Because clearly like you've got some stuff going on' and then say, let's say we don't feed our body as much food as it needs to survive and then we get on a

> treadmill and run. So, your body's like, right, there's a famine and we have to run from bears. I gotcha. It's really no problem. I'm going to start dropping type two muscle because it's expensive. I'm going to start slowing down our metabolism even more. I'm going to flood us with even more hormones because what with the starving and the bears you're clearly not thinking about food and so this leads people to a place where they're constantly hungry. Their bodies have become as efficient as possible at storing food and so within the next two to five years they're gaining back that weight. What we hear is, 'Oh, well they go back to their old habits.' Old habits meaning no longer giving their body less food that it needs to survive in the hopes that it will eat itself and become smaller. And so, we know this is true. What weight loss companies have done is a great job of taking credit for the first part of the biological response where people are able to lose weight short term and blaming the client for the second part of the biological response where they gain it back. And this leads to things like I go and give a talk and someone, a fat person, comes up to me and says, 'I don't think you should talk badly about Weight Watchers because I did it six times and it worked every time' and I'm like I'm just kind of slow blinking because I can't think of anything to say that won't seem mean to them, but I'm like, 'We have a different definition of worked.' Right? If I pay a company to attain a certain body size and I don't, like that's not worked. (Fattitude)

Chastain is so clear—diets don't work because the body "doesn't have an understanding that there's a cultural benefit to it being a certain size" and it doesn't understand why we are starving. Her description of running from the bears is memorable and funny. This is

great stuff. But it's more than two minutes long, and she gets the really hard work done with her first few lines starting with 'What happens in studies…" and ending with "…not for nothing, but I could loofah and lose two pounds right now," and so that's all *Fattitude* viewers will see because the time needs to be allocated to other ideas.

Viridiana and I believe that we can use the richest pieces of footage that were set aside during the making of the film to create small additional videos that are used either on *Fattitude's* website or as DVD extras. In addition to releasing some of the footage that explores the nuances that particular groups face outside of representational visibility, we have some smaller interesting pieces about the history of body image. For example, Dr. Deah Schwartz brought a collection of dolls to her interview to show the thinning progression of body shape available to children from her childhood till now. Another interesting short that we have in the can is a discussion of vanity sizing and the realities of plus size fashion. This information is poignant, practical, and perhaps a tool in the conversation about fat acceptance, but it is not in line with the argument that *Fattitude* is making.

With the filming, organizing and editing done, we reached the point where the film needed a post-production team: an illustrator, a motion graphics designer, a colorist, a post-production sound team, and a composer. Considering our limited budget, coming up with this team was a challenge. Our first quote for motion graphics was $45,000, literally more than the entirety of our budget at the time. So, rather than feel hopeless I started to consider our options, and of course I once again turned to my research skills. I read articles online about saving money during film production that said many top-notch companies had started to do their post-production finishing in foreign countries to bring

down costs. But this option felt counter intuitive to my intersectional feminist politics.

The truth was our budget was so limited that our post-production team had to be invested in *Fattitude* as a passion project, just like Viridana and I were. So, I started to look for those people—people who were either connected to the body positive movement or interested in social justice in general. Once I began to explore this idea, I also started thinking that it would be really fun to try to employ either all women or mostly women. In general, the film industry is an arena disproportionally dominated by males, so giving qualified women opportunities to add to the resumes seemed like a win-win. With each of the crew members that we hired, I was very upfront about what we could offer them financially, and each of them conceded that their desire to work with *Fattitude* was not financially motivated.

The first person I added to our post-production crew was Valerie Doty. Doty is an illustrator who is well known in the body positive and fat acceptance communities. She goes by The Tiny Hobo, and she has created commissioned portraits of well-loved activists and bloggers, such as Jes Baker. There were a number of places in *Fattitude* that called for illustrations, most often moments when interviewees were telling stories about their own experiences. Doty's illustrations include Kelsey Miller's description of the diet cycle/brass ring, Deb Burgard's treatment of anorexia vs. obesity treatment, Lindy West's description of the eyeball guy, Virgie Tovar' s story about waiting for the BART, Melissa Fabello's explanation of thin privilege, the illustrations included in the finale manifesto, and an illustration of Andrew Walen's discussion of his belly as recipient of his son's hugs, which was cut from the final version of the film.

Illustrations were one of the spaces where *Fattitude* was actually creating

representations of fat people, so it was important to us that the images recognize the actual girth and shapes of fat bodies. Since Doty was already making fat-positive images there was no need to worry that she would try to *thin* out our illustrations. Furthermore, Doty's illustrations have a feel that both Viridiana and I were drawn to. We called it "sketchy-sketch," Simple line drawings that were reminiscent of the kinds of drawings you might see in *The New Yorker* or a political cartoon. Doty was paid a fair sum to complete a number of illustrations for *Fattitude,* but that is definitely not why she joined our crew. When I reached out to her regarding the illustrations for *Fattitude*, Doty made it clear that she was familiar with our work and that she was more than excited to participate because she wanted to support and be part of the work that *Fattitude* was attempting to accomplish.

Finding a motion graphics designer was more complicated. To my knowledge, there is not a motion graphics designer that is part of the body-positive community, so finding Sara Roma required some digging on my part. I spent endless hours on Vimeo watching motions graphics reels. It was a tricky process. Initially, I just watched any and all reels, hoping to stumble on one that suited *Fattitude.* Eventually I realized that I was looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. So, I needed to come up with some variables that could limit my search. Always considering our limited budget, it occurred to me that if I wanted to find someone motivated by passion, it might make sense to look at people who were just starting out and hoping to build their resumes. Obviously, I also needed talent. So, I started to research recent graduates or students in top notch motion graphics programs. I found Sara Roma at the Savannah College of Art and Design. It was the summer of 2016 and she was headed into her senior year. For Roma, working on a

film with *Fattitude's* level of exposure before she even had a degree was a feather in her cap. Again, Roma was paid for the work she did for *Fattitude,* but she, too, believed in the work *Fattitude* was doing and signed on for more than just dollars.

Our work with Roma began with a conversation. Roma's job was extensive. She created *Fattitude's* title sequence, the opening empty space sequence, the map of the US that highlights discrimination law, the discrimination statistics sequence, the food desert sequence, the F-word doodle graphic, the final manifesto sequence, the "lower thirds" (interviewees title captions), and *Fattitude's* credits. Viridiana and I were open to allowing Roma to experiment with her own ideas for *Fattitude's* motion graphics. We wanted Roma to feel that the motion graphics she created for *Fattitude* resonated her artistic voice, so in the future she could use *Fattitude* to showcase her skills and attain work. During that first conversation we discussed our ideas about *Fattitude's* motions graphics, and then Roma presented us with a treatment.. Based on our conversations, Roma drew her ideas from the DIY nature of indie film and grassroots social activism. She explained that the approach would focus on paint and grunge texture, large type and ripped paper. Roma used texture throughout the film, maintaining a tactile look that harkened to protest signs, revolution and what she called a "faux-punk" aesthetic. Viridiana and I were regularly overwhelmed by Roma's creative vision for the film; it added a creative layer that we adored.

The third addition to Fattitude's post-production crew was Jen Schwartz, our composer. Schwartz fell into my lap—another networking miracle. Schwartz is Savannah Dooley's partner, and a few months after Dooley's interview, she emailed me and mentioned that if *Fattitude* was looking for a composer, Schwartz would be interested in

talking to us. Like Roma and Doty, Schwartz took on *Fattitude* as a passion project and created an incredible score at a greatly discounted price.

When it came to score, Viridiana and I were interested in something that supported the tones of the film, something that felt more ambient than overwhelming. For us, the film crescendos. It starts out serious as we expose the media issues and then gets more intense as we look at the real world issues, only to break and become more positive when we explore possible solutions. In response to our ideas, Schwartz explained her concept like this:

> The score is divided into 4 different sections. The first section is mainly marimba (and a little cello) which allows for darkness and contemplation, but doesn't get too emotional so that there's nowhere left to go for the rest of the film. The second section would have harp and cello. Harp is considered a 'feminine' instrument, which would play into the discussion about what beauty is. It would still remain contemplative and minimal, but be a little lighter than the first section. For the fear mongering section, the cello can take over as the percussive instrument, and bassoon can be added for a more ominous feel. For the last section, I might bring back all of the instruments to tie it together, but go in a more upbeat and positive direction.

Schwartz's ideas were right on target and her music tracks were so good that we almost never needed her to revise.

Once Roma, Doty and Schwartz had completed their work, *Fattiude* had reached picture lock, meaning we had a final version of all visuals and score. However, before we could move on to festival submission, *Fattitude* needed a post-production sound team.

Having hired all women up until this point, I wanted to continue that streak but I was having an impossible time finding a female sound editor. Returning to my trusty friend the Internet, I discovered soundgirls.org, an organization founded to help support the career advancement of female sound and audio professionals. According to soundgirls.org women only make up 5% of all audio engineers, so my search was complicated for a reason. Still wanting to hire a female sound engineer, I wrote to soundgirls.org and asked them if there was anyone they could suggest for the job. They didn't have a particular suggestion but they posted my needs to their member board and I was contacted by Racounteur Sound, a full service post-production sound house located in Oregon. Racounteur Sound is run by a female/male team Marinna Guzy and Colin Lechner. We agreed on a price and over a couple weeks, Guzy and Lechner magically polished *Fattitude's* sound, rendering it clear where it needed clarity, and adding the sound effects and sound tweaks it needed.

In addition to all the crew that I have mentioned here, *Fattitude* also hired a colorist—someone who evens out the color tones in a film's video footage. Our colorist was a friend of a friend and currently we remain unsettled with regard to the film's color. Both Viridiana and I feel that at times our footage is too warm, meaning it favors orange and red tones. However, correcting this coloration has proved complicated. When we shift to blue tones, the footage becomes too shadowy and cool, so currently, we have put color correction on hold in hopes that we can return to it in the future.

Even if we never return to *Fattitude's* color, I am proud of the project we have produced. The final version of *Fattitude* is more than I hoped it would be. It features amazing voices, details the nature of fat oppression, includes data on issues of systemic

prejudice, brings up questions of the convergence of fatness and race, sexuality and economics and, as was our original intention, it forces viewers to see that the main stream media is wrought with fat bias.

Stereotypes, Pathology and Dysfunction:

Understanding Representations of Fat Bodies in the Mainstream Media

From day one, *Fattitude's* focus was on defining the impact the media has on our assumptions about fatness. In *Feminism and Pop Culture*, author and feminist thinker Andi Zeisler explains that popular culture functions not only as entertainment but as an educational source, enabling individuals to understand and define both their place in the world and their understanding of the cultural hierarchy. Specifically, Zeisler says:

> [Pop culture] is the main lens through which we look to understand ourselves and those around us. It helps us decide who we are, who our friends are, and who we want to be. It tells us what clothes to wear if we want to look cool, what car to drive if we want to be successful, and how to treat those who are different from us in race or class or creed. It tells us whom we should date and how we should expect to be treated; it tells us of whom and of what we should be scared and what should make us happy." (144)

Fattitude is grounded in the idea that Zeisler forwards, the idea that popular culture contributes to how we perceive and shape cultural ideology and individual lived experience. Furthermore, when the popular media that is being created, presented and consumed unilaterally stereotypes or condemns a particular group in a demonizing way, then the fallout is often a climate of cultural oppression for the stereotyped group. In the *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation,* film studies scholar Richard Dyer notes

that "representations here and now have real consequences for real people, not just in the way that they are treated…but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable the way people can be in a given society" (3). Dyer explains that the media we see shapes not only our philosophic understanding, but also our living actions, therefore enabling some and placing limitations on others.

The power of media to shape cultural perspectives and behaviors is not a new idea. The following list of categories and names doesn't even scratch the surface—but feminists (Bordo; 1997, Caputi; 2004, Hill-Collins; 2000), art historians (Benjamin; 1936, Berger; 1972), disability studies theorists (Garland-Thompson, 1997), film theorists (Mulvey; 1975, Dyer; 1993, Williams; 2008) and Greek philosophers (Plato; 520a) have all considered the power media/representation wields in terms of shaping our cultural perceptions, and many of these thinkers have linked media's power to the cultural structures that enable oppressions and privileged statuses. Leading into a discussion about representations of homosexuality, Dyer makes connections between media representation and oppression with particular clarity, writing, "how we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation" (1). In other words, media representations are never just frivolous entertainment; instead they are always functioning on a semantic level, shaping how individuals process and relate to others.

With this concept in mind, *Fattitude* argues that fat hatred is a learned behavior, highly influenced by the negative discussions and depictions we see of fat people and fatness in popular Western media. In today's world of endless media proliferation, representation of any group could be called an unwieldy beast. The goal of this chapter is

to first be very clear about the work that false or generalizing representations do in terms of creating unfounded climates of stigma, stereotype and oppression, and then explore how consistent characterization of fatness as symbolic of dysfunction or disease has contributed to our negative understanding of fat people.

Thin vs. Fat: The Divisive Nature of Generalizing Stereotypes

Just for a second, let's get clinical about representations of fatness. In 2003, Greenberg, Bradley S. et al. published a research study, "Portrayals of Overweight and Obese Individuals on Commercial Television," which found that:

> Of 1018 major television characters, 14% of females and 24% of males were overweight or obese, less than half their percentages in the general population. Overweight and obese females were less likely to be considered attractive, to interact with romantic partners, or to display physical affection. Overweight and obese males were less likely to interact with romantic partners and friends or to talk about dating and were more likely to be shown eating. (1)

In other words, rather than be represented as real people with friends and lives, fat people on television are stereotyped as sad sacks who spend some serious time consuming food. The takeaway here is that in proportion to the actual fat population, fatness on screen is underrepresented, and most often negatively stereotyped.

It is important to examine stereotypes because they function as cultural shorthand, a way of generalizing the cultural understanding a particular group. Dyer explains that despite the common belief that stereotypes contain some modicum of truth, it is often the stereotype that is the source of negative ideological ideas about a particular group. He

writes:

> The effectiveness of stereotypes resides in the way they invoke a consensus. Stereotypes proclaim, 'This is what everyone—you, me, and us—thinks members of such and such a social group are like,' as if these concepts of these social groups were spontaneously arrived at by all members of society independently and in isolation. The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype. Yet for the most part it is *from* stereotypes that we get our ideas about social groups. (Dyer 14)

Dyer is explaining that stereotypes are markers for how the culture perceives a particular group, and they are presented in such a way that we, as individuals, come to think of these group definitions as factual cultural agreements, thereby not only removing the independence from individuals with in that group, but also erasing the reality that the knowledge of the group was gained via representation rather than experience. Dyer takes this idea of a stereotype creating cultural "consensus" one step further, noting that:

> The most important function of a stereotype: to maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who is clearly beyond it. Stereotypes do not only…map out the boundaries of acceptable and legitimate behavior, they also insist on boundaries exactly at those points where in reality there are none (16).

The representational stereotype is a tool of oppression. The stereotype allows people to generalize and construct interpretations of people based on the categorical groups they belong to rather than perceiving them as individuals, capable of varied humanity. In

Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins also makes this point, calling stereotypes "controlling images," emphasizing that the purpose and design of the stereotype is "to make racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of social injustice," such as fat oppression, "appear to be natural, normal and inevitable parts of everyday life" (77).

It is my contention, and that of many others, that the stereotype is powered by dualistic thinking, or rather, that stereotypes function by creating an "us" and "them" mentality. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, feminist theorist and environmental philosopher Val Plumwood explains that the entire Western philosophic tradition is based in the rendering of dualisms. She defines dualistic thinking as "the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive" (31). Her point is that culturally, we formulate our understanding of the world and cultures by defining things in opposition to each other and this opposition implies a hierarchy of dominance and submission. For example if we look at dualisms such as male/female, civilized/savage, mind (spirit)/body, culture (human reason)/nature, master/slave, thin/fat etc., we recognize that traditions of western philosophic thought and practice have often defined these concepts in opposition to each other and rendered one dominant over the other: male over female, civilized over savage, mind over body, culture over nature, master over slave, and thin over fat. Besides Plumwood, many other feminists, including Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Susan Griffin (1981) and Susan Bordo (1987, 1993), tie dualistic thinking to a variety of oppressive acts, including racism, sexism, and bodily hate. Plumwood calls this construction of reality in terms of hierarchical dualisms the "master" consciousness or the "master model," highlighting the inherently oppressive

outcome of this kind of thinking and linking its origins to the roots of Western philosophy (think Plato, Aristotle, Descartes etc.) and the Abrahamic religious traditions (Plumwood 3, 23).

From this perspective, at the core of continued oppression of material beings is the assumption that human reason dominates all, particularly the corporeal, natural or material. In this context, mastery is gifted to those who are categorized as the most "reasonable," and of course the kyriarchy—a racist, patriarchal, homophobic, sizeist, sexist culture—showers mastery on thin, white, heteronormative males, while degrading or demonizing all others. It is in the context of this philosophic framework that we define all oppressive constructs and formulate stereotypes. We perceive one group as completely opposite and therefore better than another group. In many ways the philosophical foundations of oppressions are based on deeply held divisive beliefs that there is not a continuum of ideas, behaviors, traits, morality etc. between opposing bodies, and we disseminate these messages through stereotypical representations of oppressed groups.

In *Fat and Proud*, fat studies scholar and activist Charlotte Cooper notes, "like other kinds of oppression fat hatred plays on divisions between people. It encourages us to think in terms of binary oppositions, by which I mean that the fantastic variety of human body shapes is reduced to two opposites: fat and thin" (33). As discussed earlier in this writing, referenced as thin-thinking, thinness is understood as not only as in opposite to fatness, but as also superior to it. In turn, representations of fatness are associated with traits that are perceived as negative or, using Plumwood's framework, not master-ed or master-ful. In "Monstrous Freedom: Charting Fat Ambivalence," fat studies scholar Lesleigh J. Owen tells us that to maintain the "current social order, which privileges the

intellectual and social over the emotional and biological, fat bodies must become monstrous. They are failures. They are the abnormal that delineates the boundaries of normalcy. (4) The choices of which bodies are represented are not arbitrary. These choices are deeply rooted in the political construction of bodies as signifiers, and arguably the thin body is represented because as a signifier it represents the body in its most controlled/controllable form, while the fat body connotes the uncontrolled/uncontrollable. Fatness is regularly associated with subordinated side of concepts in a dualist framework. Fatness is understood as uncivilized and unreasonable; it is the body gone awry—completely unsupervised by the mind. This perception of fatness renders it as less than and enables fat bias in the culture.

Unfortunately, the prevalence of fat bias lurks deeply beneath the awareness of the cultural consciousness—so much so that the cruelty of it remains almost invisible to the average person. Here's the thing about any contemporary cultural prejudice: although these ways of thinking are terrible and should clearly end, being filled with assumptions about a particular group does not generally show itself vividly, like the cartoonish villains we see in movies and comics and other popular culture. Everyday prejudice is much more insidious. In the article, "Five Faces of Oppression" Iris M. Young explains how prejudice can lurk unnoticed in everyday practices. She writes, "While structural oppression involves relations among groups, these relations do not always fit the paradigm of conscious and intentional oppression of one group by another" (Young 4-5). Often, "Oppression…is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following

those rules" (Young 4). Let me give you a quick example. If someone who bought into the thin/fat dualism was interviewing a fat person for a job, s/he might assume that fat people are lazy and therefore choose not to hire someone fat even if that person was qualified.

In the contemporary Western world, many experiences of oppression are not going to be physically violent—although violence certainly happens and continues to take place all over the world at an alarming rate. That said, contemporary oppression often takes a multitude of philosophic forms and depends on problematic assumptions and microagressions[7]—the commonplace indignities that those who are othered or oppressed face on a daily basis. Examples of microagressions are asking an Asian-American where they're really from, assuming that someone who looks Hispanic speaks Spanish, or following an African-American person in a store to ward off shoplifting. Fat people also experience microagressions, for example being made to listen to people who are smaller complain how fat they are, having people question how you—a fat person—attracted your mate, or dealing with the constant assumption that you are either dying to change your body or are unhealthy. Microagressions might seem inconsequential, one-by-one, but they add up to system of prejudice—death by a thousand paper cuts. Contemporary oppression is often somewhat unchecked or unrealized. In fact, I would think that most people who have racist, sexist, heterosexist, classist, or fat-hating beliefs do not think of themselves as hateful. I would even go as far as to argue that they think of themselves as learned. They think they are basing their distaste for a particular group on facts, when actually they are dealing in assumptions based more on salacious news reports, inflammatory headlines, and stereotypes than actual research.

In the *'Fat' Female Body*, feminist scholar Samantha Murray confirms that fat bodies are "read negatively" and explains that cultural knowledge and ideas undermine these perceptions:

> We respond to others on a visceral level: we know their bodies implicitly, and what they mean to us. We see a 'fat' woman, and we *know* her as lazy, greedy, of inferior intelligence. We may still address her more or less normally, we may smile at her, we may eat lunch with her, or go shopping with her, but somewhere within us these kinds of understandings, these *knowledges,* of what her 'fatness' means are stirred and brought to the surface in unconscious ways… In short, we internalize all the statements made about certain bodies by society and we live them out. These idea(l)s, or discourses, inform the ways in which we understand each other, and govern our experience of and relations with, the other. (32)

It is not one headline or stereotype or off-handed fat joke at a party that creates the negative readings of fatness; it is a lifetime of reaffirming the assumption that fat is bad, so much so that the perception of fat as bad becomes invisible and therefore not open to question. When we are particularly discussing fat phobia and fat hatred the average supporter of fat injustice is going to think themselves quite logical and righteously justified because it is culturally acceptable to be fat phobic and fat hating, a perspective affirmed by the representations that we see of fatness and other bodies, which render the fat body as the body unreasonable or uncontrolled.

Let me give you an example. Consider the idea that fat people become fat because they spend their days pathologically eating endless amounts of junk food. Clearly,

excessive consumption is marked as an unreasonable or uncontrolled behavior. In their guide to achieving a state of fat-acceptance, *Lessons From the Fat-O-Sphere: Quit Dieting and Declare a Truce With Your Body,* Kate Harding and Marianne Kirby explain that a fat woman on television will often be pictured "stuffing food in her face, regardless of where she is or what else she's doing—usually with crumbs trickling down her chin, as if she baffled by the purpose of napkins" (Harding & Kirby 186). Fatness is rendered as out of control based on unhinged consumption. The fat person's desperate need to binge eat overwhelms or possesses her, and in the throes of this desire she loses her understanding of everyday social mores, including table manners. When rendered this way the fat person loses her subjectivity and becomes a joke or a warning—waddling through the world, consuming everything in her path. Murray explains that culture demonizes fat people by representing them as "visibly marked… symbol[s] of abject lack of control," the physical albatross resulting from moral failure (Murray 4).

Furthermore, fat people constantly and obsessively eating is a regularly depicted trope, one that contributes to the stigmatizing perception that fat people are at fault for their body type because they eat beyond reason. This trope is problematic because if fat people are responsible for their body type then they therefore deserve the brutality that they experience from culture. The idea that fat people are at fault for their fatness is rooted in a largely held belief that one's weight is all a matter of calories in, calories out. This generalized belief disregards the role of genetic and environmental factors on body weight. It also fails to account for the over prescription of dieting and the metabolic distortions and weight gain that can occur from repeatedly reducing of one's caloric intake in an attempt change one's body weight. Even though the long term

ineffectiveness of dieting and the genetic and environmental correlations to higher body weights are rigorously documented (Bacon, 2010; Mann, 2015, Tomiyama, 2012), people assume, or rather default to believing, that a person's fatness has only one source, the unlimited and insatiable consumption of highly caloric foods. This idea—while scientifically erroneous—is often presented by the news and entertainment media. Later in this chapter, I detail how many television news stories feature fat people eating junk food coupled with headlines that pathologize fatness as a disease and mention the obesity epidemic. Here, I am going to consider films and television shows where fat characters are eating junk food in excessive quantities.

As I see it, there are two ways that fat people committing excessive consumption get represented. First, excessive eating is understood as emblematic of a fat person's lack of control, the uncontrolled and thoughtless desire to consume, or greed. Sometimes this consumption is presented as comedic. For example in *Pitch Perfect 2* (2015), directed by Elizabeth Banks, Fat Amy (Rebel Wilson), a fat female character in an acapella group, is the recipient of romantic advances from Bumper (Adam Devine). In order to woo Fat Amy, Bumper organizes a meal in a gazebo by a lake, under a starry night sky. This might at first seem normal, but the meal is a massive display of junk food. Every inch of the table is covered in cake, candy, burgers, etc. Fat Amy's reception of the junk food is pure delight.

There are many other examples of media featuring a fat person consuming food obsessively: *Glee* (2009)*, Huge* (2010)*, Wall-E* (2008), *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971), *The Nutty Professor* (1996), *Matlida* (1996), *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life (*1983), *National Lampoon's European Vacation* (1985), etc. Some of

these examples are comedic and others dramatic, but either way, this kind of eating that we often see fat people engaging in on television and in films feeds into the problematic assumption that fat people are hapless consumers, gluttons, who could control their fatness but choose not to.

The other way that the media links fatness and excessive consumption is to reinforce the idea of fatness as pathology by associating it with mental anguish or emotional trauma. Representing a link between trauma and fatness is not without truth. There are people living in fat bodies who suffer from emotional trauma and in response they have developed relationships with food that are either somewhat disordered or full blown examples of binge eating disorder. A film that honestly relays this kind of trauma-linked relationship with food is Lee Daniels' film *Precious* (2009). Despite mainstream cultural success, this film is very much radical media. In other words, this was not a film developed by corporate Hollywood. *Precious* is a film directed by a black man based on the book *Push* written by Sapphire, a black feminist, where the plot focuses on a poor, sexually and emotionally abused, pregnant, fat, black teenager.

In this film the main character, Precious (Gabourey Sidibe) steals a ten-piece bucket of chicken on her way to her appointment with her new teacher. Precious is understandably nervous. She has been forced to leave the public school she had been attending, is failing all her subjects and is functionally illiterate. Presumably to deal with her internal stress, she consumes the entire bucket of chicken during her walk. Viewers watch Precious eat the last piece of chicken and dispose of the bucket before entering the school office. Just a few minutes after sitting down to wait for her meeting, Precious jumps up and vomits in a nearby trash can, making it clear that she has eaten more than

her body can manage, and solidifying the suggestion that her consumption is about more than a physical hunger for sustenance because she has eaten beyond her body's capability. This level of consumption is associated with binge eating disorder (BED).

In the article, "Close-Up: The Precarious Politics of *Precious*: A Close Reading of Cinematic Text," Mia Mask explains Precious's fatness as "a condition inflicted upon her by physically and emotionally abusive parenting" (99). There is literally a scene in this film where Precious's abusive mother forces her to eat. Furthermore, when Daniels presents flashbacks to the moment when Precious is raped by her father, these scenes are always intercut with images of food frying on the stove, as if to imply that food and consuming food are indivisibly linked to Precious's trauma. There are a plethora of reasons that a young poor black girl might be fat, including a lack of access to nutrient-rich resources or the fiscal means to attain nutrient-rich sustenance, but in this case —unlike the example from *Pitch Perfect 2*— the focus on food and excessive consumption are justifiably directly linked to abuse and trauma.

Another example worth considering is Willamena "Will" Rader (Nikki Blonsky) in *Huge* (2010). Will's backstory screams damaged goods. She is a girl with emotional issues because of judgmental and absent parenting. Will's parents are very wealthy fitness gurus who do not even come to visit her on her camp's visiting day for parents. In a letter to her parents Will cries and writes, "I'm not good enough for you" (Dooley and Holzman). Will's terrible parents, resulting lack of self-esteem, trust issues, and emotional eating are a consistent motif throughout the course of the ten-episode series. Will is repeatedly featured consuming excessive amounts of food, such as her eating upwards of seven brownies in five minutes (Episode 10: "Parent's Weekend Part 2").

Early on in the series, Will is also portrayed as the food "dealer" for all the "food-addicted" fat campers (Episode 1: "Hello, I Must Be Going"). In light of this behavior and backstory, viewers quickly come to understand Will's fat body as symptomatic of her emotional scars and her battle with compulsive or addictive food consumption.

In the seventh episode of *Huge,* "Spirit Quest," viewers solidify their understanding of Will as a representative of pathological behavior. Specifically, Will is represented as a young woman with a problem—an eating disorder, which she can conquer, if she would only try. During the course of the episode Will and Amber (Haley Hasselhoff) get lost in the woods and cannot find their way back to the other campers. Together they trek through the woods and note the seriousness of their situation and their extreme feelings of fear—going as far as to express the possibility that they might "die" (Dooley and Holzman). Ultimately, they find civilization—a closing diner. Inside the diner, they attempt to ask for help, but a platter of doughnuts, which the waitress is dumping into a garbage bag, instantly distracts Will. A mere glance at the tray of doughnuts leaves Will speechless, absent minded and drooling.

The diner closes and the girls are left stranded. The camera, which displays Will's perspective, follows the waitress from the locked diner to a dumpster. Will and viewers watch while the waitress tosses the garbage bag filled with the doughnuts into the dumpster. Simultaneous with the disposal of the doughnuts, Amber, who is much thinner than Will, drills Will with questions about strategy for survival. Amber is attempting to work out a plan to be found, to be saved, but because Will is clearly possessed by an insatiable desire for food, all Will utters in response is, "I swear they threw away a bunch of perfectly good doughnuts" (Dooley and Holzman). This infuriates Amber, who leaves

Will to find help. In Amber's absence, Will proceeds to climb into the dumpster to retrieve the doughnuts, which are now covered with what looks like coffee grounds or dirt. Holding a doughnut and looking desperate, Will whispers, "Help me." (Dooley and Holzman).

Will's desire for help, and her ability to ask for it is rewarded. She literally sees *a sign,* a half-covered *signet* milk carton, and this sign stops her from eating the doughnut. As the theme and/or title of this episode is "spirit quest," i.e., individual growth and epiphany, this moment is underscored as a moment of spiritual/intellectual growth for Will -- the moment when she acknowledges that she has a problem, a fat problem and a food addiction. Because the storyline features a camp director who is an active member of Overeaters Anonymous (OA), *Huge* repeatedly engages and incorporates the recovery stages of OA. The first stage towards recovery in OA is admitting you have a problem, so for viewers this moment reads like a turning point for Will, the moment when she finally admits that she is suffering from a pathological need to consume food, so much so that she is willing to eat garbage. It also signifies that there is a solution for Will's fatness – recovery from addiction – something complicated but understood by viewers as possible.

Both Will and Precious suffer from what seems to be binge eating disorder. Binge eating disorder is not merely excessive eating. Binge eating disorder is excessive eating marked by obsessive behavior, often linked to trauma and a total lack of control when it comes to the consumption of food. Again, this is a thing. Binge eating disorder exists. I am not disputing that. However, I do take some issue with representations like Will and Precious. Because there are so few portrayals of healthy fat people with healthy eating patterns in the media, these representations of disordered eating resulting in fatness take

on greater "weight" and contribute to the negative stereotype that fat people all suffer from emotional trauma and are unhealthy in multiple ways.

Not every fat person suffers from trauma and not every fat person has binge eating disorder. And yet, the kind of representation that links fatness to trauma and obsessive binge-like consumption is disproportionally represented by the entertainment media considering that only "about 3.5 percent of women and 2 percent of men" are estimated to have binge eating disorder" (niddk.nih.gov). This data about binge eating disorder becomes particularly interesting when you compare it to how many fat people there are in the US. According to the *Journal for the American Medical Association* "34.9% of adults (age-adjusted) aged 20 years or older" are categorized as obese—meaning that they have a BMI over 30. While I argue BMI is not a decent medical tool for measuring anything about human health, it is nonetheless how Western culture, science, and the medical profession currently collect data regarding body weight. I am not a mathematician, but it is easy to see that if 5.5% percent of adults have binge eating disorder then approximately 29% of fat people are fat even if they do not consume inordinate and obsessive amounts of food like the fat stereotype we see in the media.

In his interview with *Fattitude*, Andrew Walen, psychotherapist, binge eating specialist and owner of Body Image Therapy Center in Columbia, Maryland, used his expertise and his own experience with binge eating disorder to explain that even though people often conflate obesity and binge eating disorder they are not synonymous:

> Many people mistakenly think binge eating disorder is actually the exact opposite of anorexia. It's people who have to lose weight. I've had doctors and therapists and dieticians who would say things like, "I think obesity is

> an eating disorder too." And, and I'm like, "No, obesity is not an eating disorder. Binge eating disorder is actually a behavior. It's eating a certain amount of food that is larger than what maybe normally expected in a given situation... If I go to a buffet I'm gonna eat more and so is everybody else. Some would say, "Well, going to a buffet is a binge." And I would say, "No. it is not a binge." I'm eating just like everybody else would expect to.

Walen goes on to describe the moment when he realized that his relationship with food was something more than over eating, something deserving of a clinical diagnosis and treatment:

> I had a poker game… and we always had this amazing barbeque. One of the guys who was in the game made these… wings with this spicy marmalade jam sauce. It was unbelievable food. And that was the biggest part of my draw. I was like, "Great food. Okay, I'm gonna lose my 60 bucks but the great food." I lost my money. And I'd had a really rough day of arguing of my wife and, and was worried about, you know, deadlines for work and things like that. … This game lasted for eight hours. 45 minutes in and I'm broke. So I go into the kitchen and I start eating some wings. I think I'm just gonna chill out and calm myself. And I get into a dissociative state. I lose track of space and time. And I'm eating, this is a tray of 100 wings, you know, setup for six guys to eat over a course of a night. And I stood in that kitchen and I ate every last one of them. I got down to waking up when I felt the food coming up into my throat. …I saw

> this tray of wings, and there is six more. And this, you know, congealed sauce and yuck and whatever. And still my brain was still telling me, "Have another. Have another." And I did. And I was crying 'cause I wanted to tell my hand to stop going and picking up that next piece. And I can't. I literally can't. And I got down to the last one and I'm sobbing as I'm chewing and eating and filled with rage at myself and guilt and shame and I had no control. That is the definition of binge eating. It's the sense of total loss of control.

When we say binge eating, we don't mean the overeating – taking those last two bites when we're already full or splitting dessert with friends when there is no biologic necessity for the extra calories. That is eating beyond one's level of satiety and this is how many people without trauma of any kind gain weight. Eating an entire ten-piece bucket of chicken until you vomit, consuming a table full of sweets and other nutrient-lacking foods, or shoving seven brownies in your mouth in less than five minutes is more than eating beyond satiety; it's clinical compulsive binge eating. Like the representations described here, in real life this behavior is often linked to emotional issues and trauma, while eating beyond one's satiety is a fairly normal practice among those in Western culture who are economically capable of doing so.

In other words, like Walen points out not all fat people are suffering from an eating disorder. Not all fat people suffer emotional trauma that scars them and drives them to food, and yet if you get all your information about fat people from the entertainment media you could assume that most or many fat people are suffering from either disordered eating related to trauma or full blown binge eating disorder. The point I

am trying to make is that the stereotypes we see in the media aren't always completely rooted in facts; they can also be tied to generalities and cultural myths that we've assumed are facts. Stereotypes and tropes forego individual experiences. In the case of the fat body we often see fatness associated with unhinged bodily desire—like compulsive eating or noxious traits like greed. A detailed examination of the stereotypes we see connected to fat people enables us to understand how we have come to these false assumptions about fat bodies and fat lives, how western culture has come to generalize fatness as a deviant group and therefore enabled a climate of fat prejudice.

Fat as Symbol of Dysfunction and Disease

Honestly, the cultural perception of fatness is so negative that fatness is literally used as a metaphor for all out social failure or dysfunction. Consider *Wall-E*—the 2008 Pixar film directed by Andrew Stanton. In this film, population-wide fatness is symbolic of global human failure. *Wall-E* takes place in a dystopian future; after human-kind has destroyed the earth and all human beings are living on a huge cruise-like spaceship. On this ship all the humans are very fat.

The humans in *Wall-E* have become slaves to consumerism and technology. Basically, the entirety of the human race has taken to living completely sedentary lives. In *Wall-E's* future, humans can't walk. They eat fast food all day and are endlessly entertained by looking at a screen. In the article, "Post-Apocalyptic Nostalgia: Garbage, and American Ambivalence toward Manufactured Goods," literary scholar Christopher Todd Anderson explains that the state of human life in the film "suggests that the kind of hyper-capitalism … a destructive cycle of mass production and consumption, ultimately resulting in environmental apocalypse and the cultural degeneration of the human

species," so in this context human fatness becomes symbolic of human denigration (267).

In *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*, American studies scholar Amy Erdman Farrell explains that "the creators of *Wall-E* could have chosen…to illuminate the tragic effects of over reliance on technology" in any number of ways, but they relied on "a powerful easily understandable shorthand to designate the downward evolution of these people: fat" (117). Fatness functions as a monstrous metaphor for the curse of human over-consumption and greed, elements of human behavior that are perceived as desires that need to be controlled. And clearly we all know that you don't have to be a fat person to commit the sins of environmental destruction, religious consumerism or fast food consumption.

All that is problematic in *Wall-E's* doomed future filled with fat people, the enactment of fatness as a metaphor for dysfunction or failure or disease, regularly plays out in other media spaces, such as the news media and reality television. In the article "Challenging stereotypes and legitimating fat: An analysis of obese people's views on news media reporting guidelines and promoting body diversity," sociologists Holland et al. note that the "dominant" narratives regarding fatness, i.e. "obesity," present it as a "health problem of epidemic proportions" and that this "anti-obesity discourse is… presented as a 'fact', and framed through the language of threat and risk" despite many studies and perspectives that confirm that "such certainty is unwarranted and misleading" (434). What Holland et al. are confirming is that the media perpetuates a demonization of fat bodies and adds to fat prejudice and fat fear by allowing bias to dominate all conversations about the relationship between fat bodies and a cultural definition of universal optimal health.

For example, in journalistic contexts or reality television shows, like NBC's *The Biggest Loser* (2004) and ABC's *Extreme Weight Loss* (2011), the fat body is understood as the pathological body. In fact, fatness and fat people represented in the news media emulate the culturally ingested understanding of the fat body as pathological no matter what their current health status is. Even if all health markers—blood tests, stress tests, scans etc.—point to a fat person's good health, their fatness is still understood as symbolic of either their emotional pathology or their future pathology via compulsive eating, heart disease, diabetes and death. In *Fattitude*, Lynne Gerber, author of *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America,* interprets the cultural climate of envisioning fatness as dysfunction and disease quite humorously, noting how Western culture constantly connects fatness with death. She says all we see is "fat death, fat death, death, death, death, you're gonna die, you're gonna die die die die die. You're gonna die. Fat gonna die, gonna die, gonna die, gonna die, gonna die, gonna die, gonna die."

As I have already mentioned how we pathologize fat people's actual food consumption, when considering fat hatred in the news media and reality television, I'd like to discuss the use of inflammatory language and the acceptability of dehumanizing images. When I say inflammatory language, I am talking about phrases like the *obesity epidemic*. This term is inflammatory for multiple reasons—first the term *obesity*. When we use the term *obesity*—a medical term that positions fatness as a disease—we are instantly pathologizing fat people. We are no longer seeing them as human beings of a particular body type—instead they are a medical problem that needs a solution. In her detailed exposition of fat-hatred, the rise of fat activism, and the need for fat acceptance,

Charlotte Cooper, author of *Fat and Proud: The Politics of Size,* explains the culture's medicalization of fatness as *obesity*:

> Obesity is a medical condition named from the Latin for 'having eaten.' Obesity is considered a disease because a fat body is regarded as proof that somebody has eaten too much according to social norms, and eating more than one is thought to need is considered pathological. (70)

In the *obesity* framework, fat is a condition, a disease, an unhealthy pathology. Often, in addition to being understood as physically unhealthy, *obesity* is concurrently understood as a marker for emotional pathology. We regularly see figures like Oprah or Dr. Phil present the fat body as symptomatic of emotional or psychological issues. Cooper explains, "It is assumed…that [fat people] are addicted to food; that body size is an expression of inner conflict; that [fat people] were denied love as children and seek misdirected compensation by comfort eating" (78). In other words, a fat-phobic culture "marginalize[s] and stereotype[s]" the fat body as a living breathing billboard signaling an eating disorder caused by a mental inadequacy or emotional loss, rather than comprehending fatness as a natural/normal bodily state (Cooper 77). Furthermore, "since disease is loaded with negative connotations, and heath with positive ones, to regard fat people as diseased entails thinking of [fat people] as abnormal and bad," or as broken and in need of healing (Copper 72).

Reaching beyond the possible pathology of an individual fat person, linking the term *obesity* with the term *epidemic* entails that fatness is not only a disease, but also a communicable one. This, of course, is ridiculous. In *Fattitude*, Lizabeth Wesley-Casella explains what others, including fat activist, Marilyn Wann (1998), have said before her:

"Fat people are not an epidemic. You can't catch fat."[6] In other words, using the word *epidemic* connected with fatness implies a plague—a contagious, infectious disease that is spreading and killing people. This is an inflammatory and hateful way to describe a body type.

Another example of inflammatory language is some of the language that was associated with former First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* campaign, which despite its good intentions—promoting childhood nutrition and movement—was framed really poorly. For example, in an interview with *Good Morning America,* Obama said she wanted to eliminate childhood obesity "in a generation." The use of the word "eliminate" is scary, and only in a culture of weight bias would the inflammatory nature of "eliminating" fat kids go unnoticed. What if we said we wanted to "eliminate" all Baptist kids "in a generation"? Or all kids with disabilities? There will always be fat kids, no matter how many greens they eat or what movement they enact. As Marilyn Wann says in *Fattitude,* this kind of language is "pretty eugenics-y." You can't "eliminate" fat kids, and you wouldn't want to.

Beyond language, the images we see of fat people in the news media are often completely stigmatizing and lacking a sense of personal agency. In 2007, Cooper coined the term "Headless Fatties" for the often headless images of fat people that accompany news stories about dieting and obesity scare tactics (Charlottecopper.net). Cooper writes:

> I started to notice the Headless Fatty phenomenon a couple of years ago, when the current wave of the War on Obesity (also known in the press as the Global Obesity Epidemic, the Obesity Crisis, etc.) began to get coverage. Every hand-wringing article about the financial cost of obesity,

> and every speechifying press release about the ticking time bomb of obesity seemed to be accompanied by a photograph of a fat person, seemingly photographed unawares, with their head neatly cropped out of the picture. (Charlottecopper.net)

These images are notorious because they are so prolific. These are the images we see in newsreels and accompanying articles that feature the headless backsides and bellies of fat people. Rebecca Puhl et al. conducted a study in 2011 that looked at how many images that accompanied news media were "isolating certain body parts and emphasizing unflattering portrayals of excess weight," emblematic of the kind of image that Cooper would call a "headless fatty." They found that "the majority (72%) of overweight and obese individuals depicted in online news photographs were stigmatized" in this way (8).

Cooper tells us how these "headless" images deprive fat people of dignity and respect. She writes, "The body becomes symbolic: we are there but we have no voice, not even a mouth in a head, no brain, no thoughts or opinions. Instead we are reduced and dehumanized as symbols of cultural fear: the body, the belly, the arse, food" (Charlottecopper.net). In other words, "headless fatties" delete a fat person's humanity. These images are not human beings anymore, but rather they are fat objects, monsters, a symbolic rendering of the body with no mind to control it. This is the body we are disgusted by, the body we need to look away from and are terrified of becoming. Furthermore, Cooper argues that there is another layer of "symbolism" to these headless images, noting that the people in the images have been "beheaded." She explains, "it's as though [fat people] have been punished for existing, our right to speak has been removed by a prurient gaze, our headless images accompany articles that assume a world without

people like us would be a better world altogether" (Charlottecopper.net). The symbolism that Cooper sees is similar to the language that Michelle Obama was using, "eliminate." That seems to be part of the messaging that the news media and reality television are projecting, that the world would be better if fat people didn't exist.

In *Fattitude* we spend a significant amount of time discussing NBC's weight-loss game show, *The Biggest Loser* (2004), which has drawn upwards of "10 million viewers" and has "been franchised to nine other countries" (Yoo, 294). The underlying premise of shows of this nature is intrinsically linked to a world where we understand fatness as in need of utter elimination at any cost. In particular, *The Biggest Loser* is a show where contestants are chosen to live on a ranch in California where they will diet and be drilled by exercise trainers so that they lose weight. After their time on the ranch, the contestants return home and continue to lose weight on their own. The show is a game show of sorts. The contestant who loses the most weight at the end of the allotted time wins a large sum of money. While they are on the ranch, the contestants consume a low calorie diet and work out almost all day long. From every season of *The Biggest Loser* there is footage of contestants exercising until they vomit. There are also endless clips of trainers ridiculing contestants and fat-shaming them, using brutal bullying and scare tactics focused on fat as a future cause of their deaths. The shaming, starvation, and brutality that goes on at The Biggest Loser ranch is so terrifying that fat rights activist Ragen Chastain believes that "if [the] show was animals instead of fat people, it would have been off the air in two episodes and they would have been sued for cruelty" (Fattitude).

For all intents and purposes, *The Biggest Loser* is based on understanding that contestants on the show are flawed and diseased because they are fat, so they need to stop

being fat. In *Celebrity Studies Today*, Peter Lawler professor of political philosophy and American politics at Berry University falls into the trap of our culture's weight bias when he explains that what *The Biggest Loser's* winning contestant does "is ascend (or better shrink) to normalcy from being a genuinely huge loser—a person who's self-indulgently become too fat to function or even go on living" (420) There are two issues at work here. First, notice that Lawler perceives the fat person's body as "self-indulgent." This idea harkens to a dualistic understanding of the body as in service to the reason of the mind. It also calls out gluttony and the idea that bodily desires are to be controlled and repressed. In this context, fatness is a flaw that occurs in response to mental weakness. There is no room whatsoever for the possibility of fatness as a normal state, or fatness based on genetic or environmental factors. Secondly, despite the fact that many of the contestants from the 13+ years of *The Biggest Loser* hold jobs, have families and go about their lives, Lawler marks them as too fat to "function or even go on living." This discourse is the space in which we understand fatness as in need of universal elimination—and in many ways it is the foundation of cultural weight bias. *The Biggest Loser* sets up a scenario that echoes the sentiments of weight bias. In her interview with *Fattitude,* Linda Bacon, Ph.D. explains, "the idea is there's something wrong with fat, and that if we can just whip this person into shape, we punish them, and make them work really, really hard, that we can eradicate their fat and they're gonna be a better person for it." Literally, "eradicating" fat is presented as a catchall solution for the contestant's—and associatively the viewer's—life concerns, and all of this is framed in the context of health.

Only *The Biggest Loser* isn't healthy. In the article "No Clear Winner: Effects of The Biggest Loser on the Stigmatization of Obese Persons," Jina H. Yoo, a

communications scholar at the Washington University's Health Communication Lab, summarizes how the kind of weight loss practiced on *The Biggest Loser* has nothing to do with health:

> From the medical standpoint many health professionals express their concerns that *The Biggest Loser* promotes unhealthy, unrealistic, and unsustainable methods of weight loss (Hill, 2005). The program often features the contestants dropping more than 10 pounds in a week by following a restrictive diet and engaging in extreme exercise, but medical professionals warn that such rapid weight loss might create dangerous expectations among audiences (Christenson & Ivancin, 2006). Rapid weight loss is known to be associated with numerous side effects, including subsequent weight regain (e.g., yo-yo dieting) and risk of developing eating disorders (e.g., anorexia or bulimia); it can also result in heart-rhythm abnormalities, which can be lethal (Van Itallie & Yang, 1984). U.S. government guidelines on weight loss (http://www.fda.gov/opacom/lowlit /weights. html) recommend one to two pounds (maximum) per week as a healthy and conventional regimen to lose weight. (294)

Yoo makes it clear that what the contestants are doing when they are competing to win the title of "the biggest loser" isn't about their health. In fact, it's quite dangerous to their health. Basically, *The Biggest Loser* sells a fat-phobic lie. It takes the elements in the culture that are riddled with weight bias, disgust for fat bodies, and assumptions that fatness is always unhealthy, and makes money at the expense of the contestants' actual

health. In her interview with *Fattitude,* Jen Posner, feminist activist, media critic and author of *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*, explains that for the media-illiterate, the message *The Biggest Loser* is forwarding is hurtful:

> One of the core principles of media literacy is being able to separate text from subtext. What makes a show like *The Biggest Loser* so dangerous, is that the text—the surface things they say to the audience—the text is all about a quest for health on the part of these participants. They are doing everything they can to reclaim their lives and be healthy, so they can be here for their kids decades from now and not, you know, die from some heart attack or whatever it is, from obesity, you know, next year and they need to do it in a healthy way, they say. But the subtext, as well as what is hidden from the audience, is all about, do everything you can to lose weight, no matter how unhealthy it is.

Posner's point is that shows like *The Biggest Loser* create and underscore the false dichotomy that fat equals sick and thin equals healthy, so all that matters with regards to health is achieving thin, a false premise. It has been scientifically proven that watching *The Biggest Loser* increases viewers' belief in multiple justifications for weight stigmatization and underscores the idea that all blame for shameful body shapes should be directed at fat individuals (Domoff et al., 2012; Yoo, 2013). The treatment of the fat body on reality television and in the news media positions fatness as disease or pathology that is emblematic of personal failure—moral failure. In this media climate, there is no questioning of the information provided because the marketplace is saturated with one message—fat people are no good.

In her book *What's Wrong With Fat,* author and sociologist Abigail Seguy explains that in the United States, "personal responsibility" dominates discussions of fatness, and this is in line with "deep-seated U.S. political and cultural traditions of self-reliance and the increasingly powerful political-economic ideology of neoliberalism, in which costs are shifted from the state to individuals and families" (70). There is no consideration for fat people, or understanding that their fatness might be due to any number of reasons. And there is no humanity in the treatment of fat people. We represent fat people as weak-willed failures who suffer because of their own missteps. And therefore, the fat person is understood as not doing all he or she can to save themselves from their fatness. In turn, they are perceived as not doing all they can to be acceptable to the culture at large.

Monsters, Fools and Sexual Deviants:

Fat Tropes as Examples of Oppressive Media

The correlation of fatness and pathology is perhaps the most transparent way we vilify the fat body. Most people easily recognize that the news media and popular culture draw strong connections between poor health, disease, unchecked consumption and fatness. While the average viewer may overlook that these conversations and/or representations of fatness and perceptions of health play a role in culture's pervasive adherence to fat phobia and fat hatred, it is not hard for people to concede that these representations exist, even if they still fail to acknowledge the possibility that this bias could and does play a role in pathlogizing and stigmatizing fat people.

Unlike representations of pathology and fatness, viewers are almost completely disassociated from the seriousness of the other kinds of negative representations of fatness. For example, when *Fattitude's* trailer was first released I had a copy on my phone and iPad that I would play when people asked me about the documentary. The first twenty some-odd seconds of the trailer is a mash-up of fat jokes from popular media—*Horrible Bosses, How I Met Your Mother, The Big C, Two Broke Girls, New Girl,* and *Friends*. Even though I was clear that *Fattitude* was a film about how culture is cruel to fat people, almost everyone who watched the trailer in front of me laughed at the fat jokes they were watching. It didn't seem to occur to them that these moments from popular culture were demeaning to fat people until the *Fattitude* interviewees began to speak. Then, the person watching mightblush or try to hide their initial laughter but it was

already clear that until that very moment he or she was oblivious to the prolific nature of negative representations of fatness.

In light of this unchecked or invisible space in which negative representations of fatness exist, I think it is necessary to detail how media representation of fat bodies are markedly stigmatizing by showing that they fall into categories that are documented by scholars as spaces of oppression. The types of representations we see of fat people underscore and maintain our cultural understanding of fatness as outside of the norm. Many of these negative representations are in line with the tropes we see of other stigmatized groups, like people of color, women, and/or homosexuality.

This chapter explores three theoretical spaces in which we see fatness represented: Fatness as monstrous, fatness as foolish, and female fatness and its correlation to desirability and sexuality. This chapter is strongly rooted in the extensive interviews, reviews and research that were done during the various phases of creating *Fattitude*, but it also incorporates the theories of oppressive representations from a multitude of scholarly sources—many of them feminist. By categorizing the representations that construct ungrounded perceptions of real fat people, it becomes easy to understand how these divisive representations shape the very real consequences and stigma that fat people face.

Fatness as the Monstrous

To really pull back the curtain and break down how depictions of fat bodies inform our pseudo-factual perceptions of fat people, I think it's best to understand that media directed at children and/or one's inner child—or, if you will, films and stories that are fantastical and often theoretically discussed in mythic terms—tend to associate

fatness with villains and monsters. In an interview with *Fattitude*, artist and fat activist Substantia Jones explained, "Fat is conceived as monstrous because we're taught these things from a very early age…monsters, and ogres, and people who threaten you, and people that you should be afraid of, those are the big ones." Like images of excessive food consumption, fat monsters/villains are easily found. Consider this list: Gru from *Despicable Me* (2010), the penguin in *Batman Returns* (1992), the angry brutal Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), the hungry, greedy witch in *Hansel and Gretel* (1812), Ursula the Sea Witch in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Jabba the Hutt in *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983), and many others. It's worth noting that there are also skinny or fit villains, but their existence is tempered by the plethora of skinny and fit heroes. The danger of these many fat villains is that there are no fat heroes, and therefore no positive visions of fat people.

Before I delve into a couple of the examples mentioned above, I want to discuss the nature of being monstrous. Very little is written about the correlation between the monstrous and fatness, however, linking the monstrous to those that are othered, or rather those who experience cultural oppression, is well documented (Anzaldua, 2000; Caputi, 2004; Creed, 1993; Halberstam; 2000; Wood, 2003). Monsters have repeatedly been understood as marking that which a kyriarchal culture looks to control and oppress. In discussing the work of Wood (2003) and Anzaldua (2000) in *Goddess and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power and Popular Culture,* feminist theorist Jane Caputi writes, "Many women and men find in the monster those aspects of the self that society and civilization, in the service to social inequality, have required both men and women to lose, to repress, stigmatize, and disown" (317). Basically, the figure of the monster symbolizes of that

which society would like to reject and/or repress based on a kyriarchal framework, so anything that is not synonymous with the privileged existence—the feminine, the homosexual, the racially different, the religiously different, and the bodily different, including both those who are of varied ability and those who are fat—gets represented as monstrous.

Take Disney's depiction of Ursula the Sea Witch in the feature-length animated version of *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Ariel, a young, white, slender mermaid with flowing red hair (a clear representation of the feminine ideal), makes a bargain for her soul with Ursula, a fat sea witch, who was modeled after perhaps the most famous of all drag queens, Divine (Bell et al. 1996). In "Disney's sub/version of Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid,'" a review about the differences between Hans Christian Andersen's 1937 edition of "The Little Mermaid," and Disney's film, scholar Roberta Trites writes, "the Disney-constructed conflict in The Little Mermaid is between an overweight, ugly woman and a doe-eyed heroine with a figure less realistic than a Barbie doll's" (1). While it's my instinct as a fat activist to say, "wait, Ursula isn't ugly!" what Trites is pointing out is that the viewer is supposed to absorb the physical contrast here, the idea that Ursula's qualities, including her weight, are in opposition to the heroine's good qualities.

Ursula's most commonly-discussed scene is the scene where she convinces Ariel to bargain her soul for a chance to be human. The deal is simple: Ursula takes Ariel's voice, and Ariel has three days to get the handsome prince to kiss her. If Ariel succeeds, she gets her voice, she gets her soul, and she can be human; if she fails, Ursula gets to keep Ariel's soul. Unsurprisingly, Ariel asks how she will seduce the Prince without her voice. Ursula's iconic answer comes in the form of a musical number entitled

"Poor Unfortunate Souls." Through song, Ursula sells Ariel on the idea of "body language," or physical sex appeal (Clements & Rusker). In her essay about the Disney film, "Where Do Mermaids Stand: Voice and Body in The Little Mermaid," communications scholar Laura Sells notes that the performance of this song is the moment that distinguishes Ursula as outside the constructs of a kyriarchal ideology. Sells writes:

> During her song about body language, Ursula stages a camp drag show about being a woman in the white male system, beginning backstage with hair mousse and lipstick. She shimmies and wiggles in an exaggerated style while her eels swirl around her, forming a feather boa. The performance is a masquerade, a drag show staring Ursula as an ironic figure. (Sells 182)

Despite the fact that Ursula's creators based her form on a famous drag queen, Sells description of Ursula figures her as a drag queen not because she is actually a man dressed as a woman, because there is no indication in the film that this is the case. Rather, Ursula's sexy dance, her "shimmies and wiggles" are drag-like because her fatness means she is not understood as feminine, as little and girly. Ursula is emblematic of unwanted, unsanctioned and uncontrolled femaleness, and therefore outside of what the kyriachy includes in understandings of what is feminine.

Ursula is a figure that represents the cultural unacceptability of both gender performance flexibility and the bountiful, unruly body. She represents female power, unrestrained and uncontained. For this reason, fat activists sometimes regale Ursula as a totem, despite her evil nature. She is heralded as the fat woman who is unapologetically

empowered. If we understand the monster as in contrast to that which is conditioned by the kyriachy, then Ursula is clearly this kind of mythic monstrous. Ursula's performance can be read as progressive because it unmasks the feminine ideal—showing the feminine ideal is not intrinsic, but rather learned and demonstrated. Unfortunately, the person who is doing this unmasking is the person the heroine and viewers fear. Terrifyingly, in this case and with other media targeting children, the viewers are most likely young people, who are presumably more malleable and less likely to do the analysis that allows them to spot defiance masked as evil. So ultimately, Ursula remains evil and dies a terrifying death, showing viewers that stepping out of line with the kyriarchy does not end positively.

Having established that Ursula is in line with the monster as symbol of what culture is afraid of or looking to avoid, the fact that she is fat and that her fatness is featured and emphasized becomes quite telling about where we culturally position fat in the cultural ideology. In *Skin Shows*, Judith (Jack) Halberstam, feminist gender and queer theorist, links these ideas about the mythic monster with the presentation of the body, noting:

> The body that scares or appalls changes over time, as do the individual characteristics that add up to monstrosity. Within the traits that make a body monstrous—that is frightening, ugly, abnormal or disgusting—we may read the difference between an other and a self. (8)

Or, if you will the 'self' is the acceptable thin person and the 'other' is the unacceptable fat person. Ursula's body is presented as other, the body that appalls—abnormal because it is overwhelmingly physical—pouring and spilling about everywhere she goes. As

Ursula moves through space her rolls and bulges are clearly drawn. Including, as Trites notes, an intense focus on Ursula's breasts, "One especially memorable sequence involves a 'zoom-in' on Ursula's cleavage, so that her ponderous bosom occupies the entire screen. Ursula's breasts seem suffocating, rather than nurturing" (1). Her suffocating fat physicality is demonized, envisioned as an extension or tool of her monstrosity. When she dances, we see her undulate. And while clearly a fat woman would undulate more than a thin woman—never once do we see a crease in Ariel's skin. If this were about realism we would see Ariel's skin folds because Ariel is basically naked; she's all bare skin other than a shell bra. The focus on Ursula's fat physicality is blatant and in your face. Rendering fat as part of those who are othered as monstrous reminds viewers to continually pursue the repression of fat as a characteristic, lest they become the thing that is both feared and hunted (Wood 2003).

Jabba the Hutt, one of the villains from the *Star Wars* saga is another example of the fat as monstrous. In George Lucas's *Return of the Jedi*, Jabba functions like a villainous mob boss. Han Solo (Harrison Ford), one of the good side's key characters, owes Jabba money and doesn't pay up. So, as villains are apt to do, Jabba captures and enslaves Han and Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), forcing the hero—Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill)—to be tasked with rescuing Leia and Han from mobster/slave master, Jabba. Physically, Jabba is a huge slimy slug-like alien—literally a pile of fat—who never stops eating. In interviews for *Fattitude*, body positive activist and author Jes Baker describes Jabba as "the ultimate villain" and "everything that gluttony entails in visual form." Feminist thinker and entertainer, Celia Finkelstein notes that Jabba is "just a pile, puddle of like blubber like fat, … he just really is just disgusting, oozy, gross fat" (*Fattitude*).

In the article discussing the philosophic nature of Jabba's bodily form, "Docile Bodies and a Viscous Force: Fear of Flesh in *Return of the Jedi*" philosopher Jennifer McMahon notes that representations of Jabba "speak volumes about our contemporary fear of fat and cultural preoccupation with being thin" (Ch. 15). McMahon's visceral description of Jabba concurs with *Fattitude* interviewees who understand Jabba as a rendering of fat-hate incarnate:

> Jabba is a personification of fat and modern Western culture's negative perception of fat. Because he isn't easily recognizable as a certain type of being (e.g., a dog or a human), he doesn't appear as something or some*one* that is fat, but as an embodiment of fat *in itself.* He's an amorphous colossus of flesh who suffers a sort of inertia by virtue of his titanic mass. He has only two vestigial arms that pale in size to his voluminous core—their apparent purpose is simply to procure more to eat, and he's almost always eating. Hapless creatures are regularly stuffed, still squirming, into his cavernous mouth. Indeed, Jabba's wide mouth is an apt symbol of his voracious appetite; it dominates his face and is made more threatening by the slimy tongue that slithers regularly from it. (Ch 15)

McMahon's description makes clear that Jabba elicits utter disgust and revulsion. His evil is made clear by his enslavement of Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) and entrapment of Han Solo (Harrison Ford), two of the s/heroes in *Star Wars.* As *Fattitude's* interviewees and McMahon recount, Jabba is undeniably a representation of fatness as repulsive identity. Furthermore, his violent consumption of 'still squirming' creatures and endless eating once again link gluttony or a failure to control human desire with fatness.

As with Ursula, in Jabba we are faced with the fat body as the monster's body—or rather the body in need of repression and oppression. The need to repress and oppress fat bodies—fat fear—can be understood as the fear of what Julia Kristeva (1982) deemed the abject. Owen explains, "the symbol of the monster, the abject, exists to embody and assuage our fears of the natural and unruly body" (4). In "Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women" Le'a Kent explains that fat is abject and defines the abject as the "revolting physicality, that repellent fluidity, those seepages and discharges that are inevitable, attached to the body and necessary for life, but just as necessarily opposed to a sense of self" (135). When Kent identifies fat as abject, she links our understanding of fatness with cultural repulsion for bodily expressions like mucus, feces, urine, menstrual blood, puss, vomit, decay, death, the physicality that reminds us we are not purely spirit, but rather earthly bodies, animals with limitation. Kent explains that as the abject, fat represents "*the horror of the body itself* for the culture at large*"* (Kent 135).

Abject bodies are those that disrupt the order of the binary philosophic system that empowers very particular types of bodies. In other words, the fat body can be understood as an abject body because it constantly reminds us that bodies do not respect binary borders, they are not linear or systematic. They are fleshy and embody the reality that bodies are not clinical things that can be intellectually controlled. Bodies are natural things that get messy, spoil, and eventually die. Owen explains:

> Fat bodies are scary and repulsive precisely because they throw cause and effect into question, blur supposedly sharp lines between seeming opposites (think im/moral, over/consumption, a/sexuality), and encourage us to rethink the divisions between the scary and monstrous Other and the

safe and socially appropriate Self. (2)

I believe this to be particularly true of Jabba the Hutt, but also of many other figures associated with fatness in popular culture. The abject references those human elements that are rendered repulsive because they affirm that the body is uncontrollable and ultimately frail and that consciousness cannot control the frailty of the body or the body's needs and desires. Jabba resonates as the abject. In her book *The Unbearable Weight,* Susan Bordo explains in contrast to tight, toned bodies, fleshiness is understood by western culture "as a metaphor for anxiety about internal processes out of control—uncontained desire, unrestrained hunger, uncontrolled impulse," and this is Jabba (189). He is the slimy fat—the repugnant and putrid reality of uncontrollable flesh, meant to resonate the horror that the kyriarchy associates with the fat body.

Fatness as Fool

When popular culture isn't presenting fatness as monstrous, fat characters are often presented as comedic figures meant to incite laughter: the clumsy, stupid, ignorant fat person, who doesn't realize that he/she is a mess. Representations of fatness regularly resonate as the fool, someone to laugh *at,* not *with.* And while we enjoy the antics of the fool, we do not perceive the fool as respectable. In "The Fool as a Social Type," sociologist Orrin Klapp explains that the fool trope is "found widely in folklore, literature, and drama" and functions as a figure in contrast to the hero, a figure that delineates who the culture understands as inferior. Klapp writes:

> Whereas the hero represents the victory of good over evil, the fool represents values which are rejected by the group: causes that are lost, incompetence, failure, and fiasco … The fool is distinguished from the

> normal group member by a deviation in person or conduct which is regarded as ludicrous and improper. He is usually defined as a person lacking in judgment, who behaves absurdly or stupidly. The antics of the fool, his ugliness, gracelessness, senselessness, or possible deformity of body represent departures from corresponding group norms of propriety. (157)

Laughing at someone, i.e., perceiving them as the fool, is a way of rendering them abnormal, outside the privileged positions in the kyriarchal structures. Often the "abnormality" or unacceptability of a fool is marked by his or her distinguishing physical characteristics and weak mindedness. Much like the fat monster, the fat fool is a figure marked by his/her difference from the culturally prescribed norm. In his interview with *Fattitude*, Jackson Katz explained how representations of fatness as the foolish reflect the viewer's desire to differentiate him or herself from fatness. Katz tells us that laughing at the "fat guy" has an "interesting function" because it underscores the fat guy as "different" and therefore not only reinforces the "fit guy" as "normative" but also helps viewers define themselves "not fat…not all those negative things." Katz's point here is the fat fool is a figure that allows the viewer to sanctify the acceptability of the thinner or average-sized body and to solidify that a thinner, more normative body is within the scope of cultural acceptance.

Often the fat body doesn't have to do much of anything other than be fat to be understood as the fool. Feminist body image scholar and editor of *Everyday Feminism* and *Fattitude* interviewee, Melissa Fabello, explains that the fat body is immediately understood as "deserving of criticism" and "laughter." She explains that a fat person

doesn't have to “say anything. They just need to walk on stage or walk on set and automatically, that's the joke. The joke is that they're fat.” Recognizing that the automatic nature of perceiving fatness as a joke is culturally constructed, Fabello goes on to note that there wouldn’t be anything funny about fatness “if we weren't sold that idea all the time, if we weren't socialized under that idea, then it wouldn't be a thing. Fat bodies wouldn't be funny” (*Fattitude*).

Consider the classic *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) skit entitled “Chippendales Audition” from Season 16 in 1990, starring Chris Farley and Patrick Swayze. The premise of the skit is that three executives at Chippendales, a male strip club, are conducting a final audition with two applicants to fill an opening for a male dancer/stripper. The skit opens with one of the executives (Mike Meyers) saying, “This is impossible, can’t we just hire them both,” so the viewing audience is theoretically prepared to see two equally qualified auditions (Micheals). After a few more moments of discussion revolving around the worthiness of both candidates, the dancers are called to the stage. Adrian (Swayze), who is tall, thin and fit enters first. Then the other shoe drops. Barney (Farley), a shorter fat man, takes the stage to a cacophony of laughter. Like Fabello implied, the audience is immediately laughing at Barney because his fat body distinguishes him as a fool. His participation in the Chippendales audition implies that he believes that he—a fat man—can be seen as a sexy stripper; this action is what Klapp and the audience perceive as “conduct which is regarded as ludicrous.” He is presented as not savvy enough to realize his abnormality.

Adrian and Barney proceed to dance side by side, and in many ways it is clear Barney is the more passionate dancer. His movements are more intense, more sexual—he

rolls his hips deeper, bites his lips more, and enthusiastically caresses his chest. He has more fever and focus. At one point Adrian even appears to be distracted by Barney's mastery of movement. And yet the reception of Barney is dictated by his fatness. Halfway through the performance the two male dancers take off their shirts and ride them—a classic stripper move. In response to Adrian the audience swoons, squeals and hoots—affirming his sex appeal. When Barney expertly executes the same move the response from the audience is still to squeal—only the squeals are punctuated by raucous laughter—reminding us that Barney isn't really sexy. His attempts at sex appeal read as funny because he is culturally ignorant, too foolish to know his appropriate cultural space.

Ultimately, Barney and Adrian are informed that the executives have made their decision. They choose Adrian. A second executive (Kevin Nealon) explains their decision to Barney saying:

> We all agreed that your dancing is great and your presentation was very sexy. I guess in the end we all thought that Adrian's body was just much much better than yours. You see it's just that at Chippendales our dancers have traditionally had that lean, muscular healthy physique, like Adrian's, where as yours is well, fat and flabby." (Micheals)

The executive's words are shamelessly clear; the abnormality of Barney's fatness is the reason he isn't chosen. From the moment Barney entered the room, the audience's response to him made it clear that his fatness—the element that Knapp would recognize as his departure "from corresponding group norms"—tagged him as the fool. His body type registered him as unacceptable, abnormal and graceless. He was something to be laughed at even though he appeared more than qualified in all other capacities.

Fatness as the fool is an unyieldingly prolific trope. Consider the works of actors Oliver Hardy, John Candy, Fred Berry, Kevin James, Chris Farley, Aidy Bryant, Rebel Wilson, Melissa McCarthy and others; repeatedly these fat actors are cast as funny people—fools, slobs, and idiots. Animated characters also adhere to this trope—Homer Simpson on *The Simpsons* (1989), Eric Cartman on *South Park* (1997), Fred on *The Flintstones* (1996), Wimpy in *Popeye the Sailor* (1960), Brian on *Family Guy* (1999).

As a general statement, race doesn't seem to change the way we laugh at fatness. Although it is worth mentioning that as is true of all media, when it comes to fat fools, whiteness is much more visible; however there are some actors of color, who often play the fat fool including Cedric the Entertainer, Anthony Anderson, Mo'nique and Gabriel Iglesias. Sadly, American culture universally treats fatness as foolish, clumsy, lazy, dumb and worthy of ridicule, no matter what skin color we are dealing with.

Unlike the question of race, a fat person's inability to meet the kyriarchal gender standard is a focal point of many fat foolish representations. Fat men fail at masculinity, and fat women fail at femininity. To be clear, when I say masculinity and femininity, I am talking about the kyriarchal categories that, when performed successfully, determine how much masculine or feminine cultural privilege one can access. (This possibility for privilege exists because the cultural majority buys into the idea that inflexible gender categories exist, and therefore are powerful only through our participation.) With this in mind, I need to be very clear that when the fat fool is defined by gender-specific jokes, it is oppressive because the joke relies on the cultural notion that there is an essentialized femaleness and maleness that we need to live up to, and that fat people are failing at that essentialized notion of gender.

This idea is something that current feminist/gender/queer theorists look to overturn, instead recognizing the "anti-essentializing" ideas, such as the thinking in Trina Grillo's "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House" (30). Grillo explains that "an essentialist outlook assumes that their experience of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts (32). Essentializing is assuming that there is an essential experience or ideal state of being for any and all experiences, for example, female, male, American, Japanese, African, Jewish, Christian, black, brown, white, green etc., when actually, all these experiences vary based on individual lived experience and varied constricts of intersectional privilege and oppression. Grillo's anti-essentialism responds to a feminism that defines feminine oppression through the privileged perspective of middle class white feminists. Certain second-wave white feminists "essentialized" their experience as *the* experience of womanhood, but anti-essentialists pointed out that "race and class can never be just 'subtracted' because they are inextricable from gender" so elevating "white middle class experience to the norm, making it the prototypical experience" becomes another source of oppression for non-normalized individuals (Grillo 32). So, while the ultimate goal is the abandonment of essentialist ideas, the continued dominance of the kyriarchal system means that being represented as capable of essentialized versions of femininity and masculinity is emblematic of embodying a privileged position in the current cultural climate. Via exclusion from the essentialized notions of femininity and masculinity, fat people are not afforded access to this kind of privilege. And therefore, failing at essentialized gender norms is one of the key elements used to delineate fatness

as foolish failure or folly.

The genre where we most often see fat men failing at masculinity is the sitcom. Since the 1950s, many sitcoms have been constructed based on a family unit that features the kyriarchal ideal of a thin and beautiful woman and her fat husband who is a buffoon. Ralph Kramden (Jackie Gleason) on *The Honeymooners* (1955), Doug Heffernan (Kevin James) of *King of Queens* (1998), Jim (Jim Belushi) on *According to Jim* (2001), Sean Finnerty (Donal Logue) on *Grounded For Life* (2001), Bill Miller (Mark Addy) on *Still Standing* (2002), Carl Winslow (Reginald VelJohnson) on *Family Matters* (1989), all of these characters fail at fulfilling the kyriarchy's traditional masculine gender identity. These characters aren't dominant, rich, strong, or people to look up to; they are fools. They are the butt of the joke—even within their family unit—where, according to a traditional perception of masculinity, they should be the master, the patriarch and therefore, beyond reproach.

Often these comedic husband/father characters are not just fat, they are working or lower middle class. Ralph Kramden is a bus driver; Doug Heffernan is a UPS delivery man; Jim is a contractor; Sean Finnerty is a bartender; Bill Miller is a toilet salesman; and Carl Winslow is a police officer. In "Setting Free the Bears: Refiguring Fat Men on Television," scholar Jerry Mosher tells us that male fatness functions "as a televisual symbol of downward mobility" (168). Class functions as a distinct marker of access to cultural privilege. Connecting fatness and the working class aligns fatness with fiscal struggle, or rather marks the fat body as not of a privileged or educated class. Furthermore, as a culture, we idealize fiscal success and connect being a good bread-winner with masculinity. In light of this, we can acknowledge that television's

stereotypical working class funny fat father/husband character teaches viewers that fat men are less culturally valued and not living up to the responsibilities of traditional manhood.

These characters are also emasculated by being portrayed as less intelligent and often less successful than their female counterpart. In "Ralph, Fred, Archie, Homer and the King of Queens: Why Television Keeps Re-Creating the Male Working Class Buffoon," an article that tracks the repetition and reasoning for this working class fat buffoon father/husband stereotype, sociologist Richard Butsch explains that this trope is someone who is "typically well intentioned, even loveable, but no one to respect or emulate. These men were played against more sensible wives" (101). The thin women/wives are portrayed as adults—they have jobs, make rational logical decisions, work hard, keep the house clean etc., while their fat husbands act like children. Through thematic analysis of fatherhood in sitcom representations, Pehlke II, Timothy Allen, et al. came to the conclusion that television sitcoms represent working class "fathers as 'overgrown children' who continue to indulge in adolescent activities. These men are portrayed as being unhelpful around the house and incapable of taking care of themselves without the help of their wives, who served as substitute mothers" (132).

In "Beauty and the Beast: Why are Fat Sitcom Husbands Paired with Great-looking Wives?" a cultural review on *Salon.com,* critic Matt Feeney notes that the defining characteristics of the fool husband/father are his "girth" and his "immaturity," giving the following examples of childlike behaviors:

> Most of [these men] are unable to master the simplest daily tasks. A recent episode of *Grounded for Life* was propelled by Sean's inability to take a

> phone message while a typical *King of Queens* knee-slapper was fueled by Doug's inability to keep his hands off a co-worker's Koosh ball, which he, of course, loses. And virtually every episode of *According to Jim* is sparked by Jim's selfishness and impulsiveness—he fights with Santa and the next-door neighbor; he pouts about having to give up his vices so Cheryl can get pregnant. Indeed, the promixity of these men to their childhood selves is often directly invoked. In a recent episode of *King of Queens,* for example, Doug's dad visits for a model train convention, which dredges up bitter memories about how as a child, Doug was not allowed—I am not making this up—to play with his dad's train. When Dad is called away from the convention and Doug offers to fill in for him, Dad is *still* reluctant to let his dumb-ass son work the controls. (And when he does, Doug promptly destroys the train set, along with its fake mountain landscape setting. See what happens when you play with Daddy's train?) (Salon.com)

In each of the instances that Feeney describes, what we see are grown men—fat men—acting like children. We are laughing at the fat working class man because he is not succeeding at being a "MAN." Admittedly, there are thin men on sitcoms who are also portrayed this way—*Everybody Loves Raymond, Married With Children*—however, this stereotype is very often portrayed by someone fat. And in this context, the sitcom dad's physical body becomes symbolic. He is soft, metaphorically failing at the rigidity of the phallic. He is not emblematic of manhood; instead, he is a boy. Defining the fat character as child-like, impotent, or immature renders him as beneath the standard of

privilege—not dominant. When the fat man is presented as joke we come to know him as incapable of maturity and undeserving of our respect.

Women who play the role of the fat fool are equally likely to be presented as failing to succeed at embodying traditional kyriarchal gender roles. The female fat body is presented often as either hilariously out of control—an aggressive slob, a hypersexual guffaw, or as a feminine masquerade, akin to Ursula's feminine drag, only presented as humorous rather than villainous. Again, we can quickly turn to SNL for an example of a fat foolish woman failing at the feminine performance.

In 2013, Melissa McCarthy hosted one of the episodes of SNL's 38th Season. Like the beginning of every episode of SNL—the announcer trumpets McCarthy's entrance, and she begins her descent to the center stage from the door that is up a flight of stairs directly behind the SNL band. Only in McCarthy's case, she comes through the door and gets sort of stymied on the top of the stairs because she cannot seem to manage to descend them in her five or six-inch sparkly red heels.

When the band concludes their intro music, a flustered McCarthy who is holding onto the stair rail in order to maintain her balance, questions them, "That seems like a lot shorter. Was that a shorter intro?… That seemed like half-time, no? Maybe I took a little longer. I might have taken a little longer…I should have tried these shoes on" (Micheals). The sense is that McCarthy is making excuses. Unable to balance in her shoes, McCarthy ungracefully steals the saxophonist's chair and pushes it in front of her using it for balance, like the infirmed might use a walker or a cane. As she makes her way across the stage, she huffs and puffs air and tries to make jokes but it is clear that she's a mess because she can't get anywhere in her high heels. Eventually, the chair slides out in front

of her and she winds up face down on the floor. The whole scene is slapstick and silly. And yet, what is clear here is that McCarthy, a foolish fat woman, cannot manage her high heels.

Currently, the kind of high heels McCarthy is wearing in this skit are cultural artifacts that hold the honor of being completely relegated to the feminine space. If you were to see man in heels like this, he would be wearing them because he was parodying the feminine, or perhaps preforming a gender experiment. Now, because heels are relegated to the feminine space McCarthy's "inability" to master her heels functions as a signal that she is not feminine.

This inability to perform femininity is confirmed once McCarthy finally gets to center stage and confides in the audience, "they told me, make sure you practice in your shoes and I said, 'What?!? I live in heels'…but I don't do that; that was not honest…I'm primarily in a croc" (Micheals). Crocs are a brand of plastic shoes known to be casual and comfortable and, honestly, neither feminine or fashionable. In fact, the internet is ripe with croc memes like the ones on somecards.com which feature drawings of women and say things like, "'Wow, that's a nice lookin' pair of crocs.' said no one ever," "CROCS…because nothing says I've completely given up like wearing ugly low cut rubber galoshes with holes in them," or "Now that you own a pair of Crocs, I am going to need a few days to reconsider our friendship." So, a woman who often wears crocs, not heels, is not part of the kyriarchal feminine ideal. Again, like the Chippendale's skit and the fat male working class character on sitcoms the humor here is linked to the physicality of the actor. Throughout McCarthy's entire monologue the audience is exploding with laughter because a fat woman fails at femininity—that's a cultural given,

so McCarthy's attempt to be feminine is foolish.

McCarthy's monologue about high heels is not the only time we see fat foolish women failing at femininity. It's a consistent joke. On SNL, fat actress Aidy Bryant repeatedly portrays characters that are uncool and unsexy, for example her reoccurring skit, "Girlfriends Talk Show," where Bryant plays the uncouth teen friend who can't seem to shift her thinking from middle school unicorns to guys and fashion. Or even in *The Muppets,* the character of Miss Piggy—who again is basically a figure like Ursula, a parody of the feminine.

Fattitude interviewee and queer theory scholar Daniel Farr notes, "When I think about Miss Piggy, I can't help but think of a drag queen. She is a drag queen. You know, she is a woman doing drag. And she's a pig." In *The Unruly Woman, Gender and the Genres of Laughter,* which examines the transgressive powers of comedic women, Kathleen Rowe explains Miss Piggy's femininity as transparent:

> Miss Piggy's persona and her humor arise from the tension between two precarious qualities: an outrageously excessive, simpering, preening femininity and a wicked right hook. Miss Piggy's femininity is evident in her awareness of her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' With cleavage baring costumes, wigs, jewelry, coy, flirtatious body language (leg-crossing, hair-flouncing) she cultivates an appearance designed to appeal to males…" but "Miss Piggy's apparent femininity is constantly undermined aurally and visually. Her voice, a tremendous falsetto, is provided by a man, Frank Oz. Even more striking, Miss Piggy physically dwarfs Kermit. She is enormous beside him, and her body is voluptuously physical. (27)

Talking theoretically about Miss Piggy failing to be feminine doesn't even seem nuanced. Her name is MISS PIGGY, underscoring that she is female, and as Farr reminds us, a pig—or rather a dirty animal—and clearly there is nothing piggish in a traditional understanding of feminine presentation (Rowe 26). However, fatness is often understood as piggy, and 'fat pig' is an insult that is often hurled at fat people. Again, we return to the understanding of fatness and its fleshy reality as a reminder of humanity's closeness to the natural world rather than an idea of spiritual enlightenment, of more body than mind.

Beyond Miss Piggy, there are representations like Rebel Wilson's 2013 sitcom called *Super Fun Night*, where three non-traditional women, a jock, a nerdy Asian, and a fat girl decide they are no longer going to hide in their house because they aren't cool enough to participate in everyday activities. Instead they are going to enjoy their lives—which for Wilson means repeatedly enacting fat foolish feminine failure. In the less than two minute promo for the series, Kimmie Boubier (Rebel Wilson), a post-collegiate fat woman, is shown as a laughable figure that fails to wield feminine sophistication and desirability three times. First, Kimmie goes to work in a fitted skirt and in an excited and unmannerly way attempts a high kick, ripping her skirt. She attempts to fix the skirt with a stapler. It's funny, but it doesn't resonate as smart or poised. Then, Kimmie is on line attempting to gain entrance to a club. The bouncer rejects her and she unzips her dress exposing her cleavage. The bouncer maintains his disapproval. Finally, Kimmie, who never gets into the club, splits her dress right up the front, so that she's standing there in her underwear, when her love interest comes outside. Kimmie is presented as an undesirable accident-prone fool, not a polished poised emblem of

feminine wiles.

Like Chris Farley's character in the SNL skit, all of these fat female characters—McCarthy, Kimmie, and Miss Piggy—are understood as failing at desirability. However, unlike a male character, for females desirability is the primary understanding of feminine value in our culture.

Female Fatness, Desirability, and Sexuality

Most often when the fat body is cast as cultural joke; it is perceived as something repulsive to be discarded, something that should not be seen unless we are laughing at it. Cultural disdain for the fat body is linked to the idea that the fat body is not 'look-able' because it is not beautiful or sexually desirable. The fat body is regularly understood as an object of disgust, and this is absolutely true for both men and women. However, representationally men are afforded access to desirability or empowerment via routes other than beauty. In her interview with *Fattitude*, feminist thinker and body image coach Isabel Foxen Duke explains that men may "hate what they weigh or they may…feel body-shamed or feel that being fat is a bad thing," but they "have a different set of pressures outside of beauty that affirm their masculinity," for example "making money or being successful," whereas women "feel that being beautiful is what they're bringing to the table…and being beautiful of course, means being thin so being thin therefore becomes…a direct measure of value for women."

Duke's sentiment, that men have alternative ways of defining their cultural value, is echoed in a representational trope of fat men that has been around for a long time and continues to exist today: the big fat boss. In *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture,* American Studies scholar Amy Erdman Farrell notes that in the late

19th century, fatness was often linked to a "generalized sense of prosperity, distinction and high status" because you had to be wealthy to have access to food (27). This idea correlates to the term "fat cat," (Farrell 29). Still in the contemporary era we regularly see powerful desired fat masculinity on screen, such as Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini), the mob boss on HBO's *The Sopranos* (1999). Tony is a fat man who is desired by a wife and a mistress; he is wealthy, violent, and powerful. His fatness might not be his greatest joy, but it doesn't keep him from being desired. It is also worth mentioning that while the foolish fat sitcom dads I discussed earlier fail at masculinity, they are still defined as sexually desirable because they married and remain married to women who are representative of the culture's beauty ideal, thin women.

In contrast to fat men and with the exception of figures that are arising from the current body positive activist movement, you would be hard pressed to find a mainstream representational example of fat feminine beauty and desirability because the essentialized construction of femininity—which once again, I'd like to dispel altogether but while it still continues to exist—relies on being desired and beautiful, just as it relies on being able to participate in fashion play—a space that is particularly limited for fat women because fashionable clothes don't come in larger sizes. So, for many women being fat means that they will never be represented as beautiful, which equates to never being feminine.

Understanding women as objects isn't something new or unfamiliar. Ringing in the second wave of feminism, Simone de Beauvoir explains the nature of women's cultural standing by saying, "humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (116). In other words,

masculinity is perceived as the norm or the superior state of humanity and femininity exists as "inessential" opposition to this norm, the object against which the subject defines himself (116). Beauvoir advocates the rise of woman from object to subject by assuming the role of the masculine. In other words, women would no longer be confined to the "feminine" roles, such as that of wife, mother, teacher or domestic. Arguably, women have attained this status; we can be everything from astronauts to porn stars, but our position as Other remains. Currently, women can choose any lifestyle they desire, and yet, the women we see represented notoriously "homogenize," i.e. they "smooth out" to suit a current and perpetuating image of perfection that encompasses ideals of weight, height, race, sexuality, etc., and refute deviations "that disturb Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual expectations and identifications" (Bordo, 24-25). In other words, women are predominately still represented as beauty objects, and so we perceive ourselves as such, forging life-long struggles for a positive body image.

In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf exposes this unquestioned meta-narrative of beauty, created by current popular culture representations. She defines "The Beauty Myth" as follows:

> The quality called "beauty" objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual

selection, it is inevitable and changeless. (12)

This is our cultural understanding of beauty and women. To attain a significant relationship, a successful sexual relationship and partner, a woman must be beautiful, and to be beautiful she must conform or contort to the vision of beauty that is represented by the popular culture. Popular culture's vision of beauty is white and thin. In *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*, Professor of Women's Studies Janelle Hobson tells us that "black female bodies" have been "widely excluded from dominant culture's celebration of beauty and femininity" (7). And, in her article "Letting Ourselves Go," feminist and fat studies theorist Cecilia Hartley explains that "beautiful equals thin" (64). So, only if she is capable of participating in this contortion—constantly struggling to be thin and to look as white as possible—will she earn herself a "strong man" willing to battle for her.

Of course, as Wolf points out, "None of this is true. 'Beauty' is a currency system like the gold standard" that helps keeps kyriarchal dominance intact (12). Fashion/beauty magazines, advertisements, television shows, films, and really all visual forms of popular culture sell fashion and beauty, an industry propelled by convincing the consumer that they are not desirous because they are less than beautiful, and therefore need to quite literally "buy" into beauty by buying products of all kinds: cosmetics, diet aids, clothes and even cosmetic surgery. The diet industry alone is a sixty-billion dollar industry. The key to creating beauty consumers and docile, controlled women is not only creating representations of beauty that women cannot live up to but also defining women as objects of beauty, i.e. objects of the male sexual gaze.

It is commonly assumed that the fat female body is not represented because it is

perceived as not beautiful, or rather not the desired object of the male gaze. In "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," Sandra Bartky explains that the fat body is "met with distaste" because thinness is a requirement of *femininity* and "Femininity as spectacle is something in which virtually every woman is required to participate" (284). Soldiers or laws do not enforce female participation in the "myth of beauty," but through the ingestion of endless representations of beauty, which include thinness, a woman learns to recognize and perform womanhood. Bartky explains further:

> To have a body felt to be 'feminine'—a body socially constructed through the appropriate practices—is in most cases crucial to a woman's sense of herself as female and, since persons currently can only *be* only male or female, to her sense of herself as an existing individual. To possess such a body may also be essential to her sense of herself as a sexually desiring and desirable subject. (287)

In order to be an "existing individual," a woman must be a "desired subject" and it is implied that to be desired one must be beautiful. In other words, a woman strives to be thin because to be thin is to be beautiful, and to be beautiful is to be *feminine,* and to be feminine is to sexually desirable, and to be desired is to be a woman, or rather, to exist.

Beauty consumers believe that if a woman is not perceived as a sex object, than she is not perceived at all. So to be successful at being a woman, it is necessary to work on and achieve a thin body, because the thin body is the body desired. We know this because the thin body is the one represented, or rather the body that is being looked at by the desirous. A woman who strives to meet the feminine aesthetic is striving to be a two dimensional representation of male desire. The feminine aesthetic defines a woman by

her level of sexual appreciation. She is as valuable as a sexual partner's desire determines her to be. Or, when speaking of representations, she is as valuable as the viewer perceives her to be.

Objectification of the female is rooted in art history, or representational history. Discussing oil paintings like *La Grande Odalisque* by Ingres, art theorist and author, John Berger explains that representations of women assume a male viewer, the male gaze. In *La Grande Odalisque* the naked female figure looks over her shoulder submissively at the viewer. She is in a state of submission, "offering up her femininity as the surveyed" (Berger 55). Women become inanimate, two-dimensional objects presented for viewing pleasure. Constantly the object of male gaze or the desirous gaze, women strive to be the one viewed and self-objectify because they think this is what the desirous partner wants. Naomi Wolf explains women want desire because "what little girls learn is not desire for the other, but desire to be desired." It is this "desire to be desired" that is represented by images that seek the male-gaze. Traditionally, the fat female body is eliminated from the bodies perceived by the male gaze, but the desire to be desired is at work in the culture's thin-thinking psyche, so when the fat body is perceived, it is recognized as failing at desirability.

Fat invisibility plays a role in excluding fat women from desire because in the media, fat women are very rarely seen as love interests or shown in sexual situations. Instead, representations of the fat female body embody sentiments of disgust—often in the context of a cruel or demeaning joke or as an evil curse. I'd like to consider a few representations of fat as disgust, including some recent advertisements from *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (*PETA) and *Interbest Outdoor* as well as the most

recent Scooby Doo movie, *Scooby-Doo! Frankencreepy*.

In the last few years PETA has promoted saving animals by using the supposed undesirability of the fat female body as a promotional device. PETA is an animal justice organization that promotes animal health, safety and vegetarianism for ethical reasons. A recent PETA ad featured a cartoon version of a fat woman in a red bikini at the beach. The woman is pictured from behind and she fills the right side of the image. The left side of the image is all text and it reads, "Save The Whales. Lose the Blubber: Go Vegetarian." Obviously, PETA's goals are to end animal cruelty, but the message here is based on the idea that vegetarians weigh less than meat eaters, and weighing less would "save" fat people, i.e. "the whales." To be fair, there are studies that show vegetarians have a reduced risk of diabetes in comparison to meat eaters. However, equating vegetarianism with healthy, nutrient-rich consumption and/or weight loss is a fallacy. Where is the data that shows becoming a vegetarian will lead all people to permanent weight loss? All vegetarians are not thin.

The foundational premise of the PETA advertisement is that a fat woman in a bikini is something to associate with shame or a lack of desirability. The PETA ad insults the woman's appearance by calling her a whale. (Strange choice, considering PETA wants to elevate the status of animals.) The association of fatness with a whale—or, for that matter, a pig—is an attempt to diminish the fat female body's acceptability by connecting or correlating it with an animal, i.e. something less than human reason and closer to nature. Plumwood helps us understand that associating the fat female body with animals is a way of demeaning that body and severing it from the revering of the human "mental characteristics" or reasoning skills (25). PETA's fat lady in a bikini isn't

valuable, isn't pretty, because, like a whale, she is emblematic not of the mind dominating the female body, but rather the failure to control bodily desire.

Another ad that capitalized on presenting the fat female body as disgusting was an ad for renting billboard space from *Interbest Outdoor*. This ad was a photograph of a fat woman's body in only her white bra and underwear. Her head is not pictured and the camera has focused on the rolls of her belly. The copy printed at the bottom of the ad reads, "The sooner you advertise here the better." Implying that if you rented the billboard space you would no longer have to suffer the nightmare of looking at this fat woman's body. Drivers are being punished for failing to advertise with *Interbest Outdoor*, and the means of punishment is being forced to view naked female fatness. Obviously, interpreting the message here relies on the viewer's understanding that the fat female body is not desirable. Literally, it is assumed.

Assuming the correlation of fatness and femininity as repulsive is not limited to advertisements. *Scooby-Doo! Frankencreepy*, directed by Paul McEnvoy, uses fat as a conceptual metaphor—presenting the idea of fatness as cursed state. In this film Daphne (Grey Griffin), the usually thin and fashionable female of the Scooby Doo gang, is cursed with fatness. The scene where this happens is brutal. Daphne is standing in a large room filled with broken creepy mirrors, so everywhere she turns she can see her fatness. In the scene, the video edits cut in closer and closer with loud jarring noises, and Daphne is screaming and crying and covering her eyes, trying to hide from becoming a fat woman. Suddenly she sees the warlock who cursed her in the mirror and he tells her that each of the Scooby gang will lose what they "hold most dear" (McEnvoy). What Daphne holds most dear is her "looks," which underscores the idea that the most important thing a

woman has is her appearance (McEnvoy). Fatness is the element that implies losing her "looks," because being fat means you can't be attractive or desirable. In *Fattitude*, Lindy West, film and cultural critic explains:

> Instead of a normal curse like, you know, she's turned into a werewolf or she gets trapped in a magic mirror or something, her curse is that she has to be a fat lady…Her curse is that she looks like me and I'm supposed to show that to my kids. I'm supposed to show that to my kids and have them internalize that narrative.

It is poignant to note West's consciousness of the messages that are being directed at our children, and to recognize that this hatred is undeniable: being female and fat is presented as literally a curse. The horror here is failing at femininity—failing at beauty. If you are a female and fat you are not represented as desirable and therefor you understand your body as figure failing at femininity.

Since female fatness is often coded as disgust, when we do see examples of fat female sexuality they are overwhelmingly marked as deviant. In the article "Consuming Bodies: Fatness, Sexuality, and the Protestant Ethic," Lesleigh Owen notes that fatness is represented either as "hypersexual" or as "asexual" (7). Basically, either the fat female body is marked as a physical incantation of ravenous bodily desire, or it is perceived as a figure unfuckable. Pardon the graphic terminology, but that is the idea—literally the fat body is rendered so ugly and grotesque that no one would even fathom it sexually penetrable.

Theorists like Owen and Jana Evans Braziel have explored the idea of representing fat femininity as hypersexual, and they both come to a similar conclusion.

Owens notes that fat folks are perceived as "hedonists who cannot or will not 'abstain' from overeating, are also portrayed and discussed as sexually ravenous" (8). And in the article "Deterritorializing the Fat Female Body" Braziel writes that the fat female body is symbolic of the "unbound carnality of hypercorporeity" (235). In general, thinness has been symbolically linked with denial of sexuality and bodily control since Christianity dominated paganism and condemned the body as sinful. True to a binary framework, the fat body is symbolically understood as the thin body's negative opposite.

In his article "Fat Beauty" Richard Klein explains the Judeo-Christian origins of artistic representations that register the correlation between sinfulness and the fleshy body:

> The earliest medieval statues of humans undressed represent the shame and humiliation of Adam and Eve…The pious Christian ideal of beauty starts there, in the humiliation of the flesh. It bespeaks a hatred of every fleshy thing that prevents the soul from instantly achieving its spiritual destiny. Flesh was no longer the blessed stuff in which the gods became present among humans. The beauty of its forms was censored by Judeo-Christian taboos…and its seductions were demonized by Christian morals. The landscape of the human body was no longer deemed to enact the mysteries of creation, proposing to the eye of the dazzled spectator an incomparable vision of tension and ease, force and yielding, strength and softness… [the body's] gauntness was evidence of the mortification of the flesh, punished for its power to entice the soul towards pleasure, away from grace (27-28).

What Klein is noting is the Judeo-Christian "censoring" of flesh as naturally beautiful. The curves of a woman's body no longer represent "mysteries of creation," but rather the fleshy body is linked to the sinful sexual body, to deviant desire. And as mentioned in the introduction to this document, this is all in the context of understanding bodily desire, "the body and its appetites," as "immoral, and that denying the flesh was a sure way to become closer to god" (Fraser 13). Judeo-Christian beliefs—which are foundational to the kyriarchal structure—link fleshiness with the deviant and gluttonous, coding it as sinful and decadent, synonymous with the pleasures of the flesh, the body, the devil. Fighting the fat body, fasting, dieting, and exercising equates to avoiding the sinful. When a figure like the fat female body is represented as hypersexual, it is perceived as less-than, because "the ideals which are held up as truly worthy of human life [exclude] those aspects associated with the body, sexuality, reproduction," (Plumwood 71).

Hypersexual fat female representation includes many pornographic images, including fetishes like feederism (people who get sexual gratification from causing a partner's weight gain), but we also regularly see hypersexual behavior in the fat female fool. Again we could look to SNL and recent performances by Melissa McCarthy and Aidy Bryant or we could discuss the nature of Miss Piggy's desire for Kermit—which in *Fattitude*, West described as "very sexualized" and borderline "rapist." But I think that the hypersexual fat female fool is most easily exemplified by looking at the 2013 MTV Movie Awards promos. Leading up to the awards show, MTV released a series of promotional advertisements featuring 2013 host Rebel Wilson and Channing Tatum.

Tatum's career spans a multitude of genres, but in 2013, he was in an action film called *White House Down.* The two MTV promos that I'm interested in discussing seem

to harken to this film. In both promos, “Tatum Feels up Wilson” and “Rebel Wilson and Channing Tatum’s Dangerous Drive,” the setup is basically the same. Wilson and Tatum are in an SUV—clearly chasing someone. There is an exterior shot where we see the SUV careening across a lawn, being shot at. Then the footage cuts to inside the car. In “Tatum Feels up Wilson,” Wilson is driving, and in “Rebel Wilson and Channing Tatum’s Dangerous Drive,” Tatum is driving. In both scenes it is clear to the viewer through tonal music and Tatum’s behaviors that they are under attack and that the primary goal in this moment should be either getting away or catching and attacking whomever they are being chased by. However, this does not seem to be Wilson’s motivation in either scene.

When Wilson is driving, Tatum speaks first, saying “Come on Rebel, let’s go!” (Tatum Feels up Wilson). Wilson responds with, “Okay Channing, I need you to get my gun,” which she informs him is in her bra (Tatum Feels up Wilson). Tatum is resistant to looking in Wilson’s bra but she insists that she can’t take her hands off the wheel. Tatum doesn't find the gun right away, and Wilson encourages Tatum to feel up her breasts. Once Tatum sees that Wilson is enjoying being felt up, he stops and she admits that her gun is in the glove box. In the second promo when Tatum is driving Wilson has some kind of a missile launcher and she insists that she “needs to get a better angle” to fire the launcher (Rebel Wilson and Channing Tatum’s Dangerous Drive). Her “better angle” is straddling Tatum’s lap and talking about his abs. Again it is immediately clear by Wilson’s facial expressions that her actions are focused on riding Tatum, not the danger at hand.

The scenes I’ve described are intended to be funny. Wilson’s sexuality is

aggressive and contrary to a normative kyriarchal understanding of female sexuality—which only accepts female sexuality when it is presented as passive and pure. Beyond that, there are complicated layers here regarding the perception of the fat female as sexually undesirable. First of all, the situation is presented as ludicrous. Wilson is a foolish "undesirable" fat woman, and Channing Tatum is an idealized version of the beauty ideal in a masculine form—tall, chiseled features, muscular, six pack abs, etc. Tatum's form is revered as ideal and worth sexually coveting. In the last few years, Tatum has starred in a film about male strippers, *Magic Mike (2012)* and *Magic Mike XXL* (2015). In the context of these films, Tatum's fit physique has become a thing discussed and desired by female audiences. The freedom to ogle Tatum's body in this way has been empowering for many women, including women of varying sizes. Roxanne Gay, author of *Bad Feminist,* openly discussed how *Magic Mike XXL* (2015), the sequel "caters, at all times, to the female gaze" and notes that this film particularly "embraces women of all sizes," and "treated women like they were sentient beings rather than sexual objects *and* the movie boldly celebrated women's sexuality" (the-toast.net). However, this empowered female sexuality is not what viewer's are seeing in 2013 MTV movie awards promos. Instead, the viewer genuinely perceives a mismatched scenario: one in which Tatum would never and clearly doesn't sexually desire Wilson. But, Wilson is super sexual and desiring of sex. Wilson tricks Tatum into sexually pleasing her. In other words, Wilson's behavior there is no sign of what feminists call enthusiastic consent, and therefore the fat woman is being sterotyped as a sexual predator. I hate to be a feminist killjoy, but this really isn't funny; it's creepy.

Owen notes that "fatness symbolizes our womanly looseness, a reminder of our

capacity for sexual consumption" and that is the notion that is being underscored here (10). In these promos, Wilson represents the fat female body as a figure marked by its insatiable desire. Her fat body is understood as a incarnation of her human morality out of control, both gluttonous and lustful. So, like the earlier example of the SNL skit featuring Chris Farley and Patrick Swazye, the comedy at play in these scenes relies on Wilson's physical fatness being culturally understood as undeserving of sexual attention. The underlying message is that Wilson's out of control insatiable desire trumps her culturally sanctioned lack of desirability, so she pursues sex without boundaries, going as far as to take sexually that which is not being given.

As mentioned earlier, while being represented as hypersexual, the fat female body is simultaneously represented as asexual or lacking sexuality. In "Aliens and Asexuality: Media Representation, Queerness, and Asexual Visibility," queer theorist Sarah E. S. Sinwell discusses representations of asexuality and notes that "film and television frequently construct asexuality by desexualizing bodies and identities that do not fit the cultural codes of desirability" (166). Sinwell posits that fat characters are "represented as asexual" because they are not culturally understood as "sexually attractive"(166). Representations of fat people and particularly fat women as asexual "continually" define fat characters "via their lack of sexual desirability," underscoring that they do not "fit the normative ideas of the gendered and sexualized body" (Sinwell 166).

In *Fattitude*, the representational trope most discussed that correlates with asexuality is the Mammy figure, a trope rife with racist, sexist and sizeist stereotyping. For decades, Western culture has created films, television shows, and marketing campaigns that feature large, dark-skinned black women who function as caregivers or

housekeepers and work in white households. This figure is a trope derived from and rooted in slavery in the United States. Collins defines "the mammy" as "the faithful obedient domestic servant" (80). Examples of the mammy trope include the branding for the Quaker Oats Pancake mix and syrup, Aunt Jemima; the house servant played by Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* (1939); Calpurnia played by Estelle Evans in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962); Nell Harper, played by Nell Carter in *Gimmie a Break* (1981); Louise, played by Margo Moore in *Forrest Gump* (1994); Aibileen Clark and Minne Jackson, played by Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer in *The Help* (2011) and many others.

In *Fattitude*, racial civil rights and body image activist Sonya Renee Taylor explains that the mammy is fat because her fatness renders her undesirable, and therefore asexual. Taylor says:

> The reason she was larger is because it made her asexual, which meant that the mistress was less intimidated about her husband having sex with this particular slave. So that woman lived inside the house and caretook the family. She often nursed—breastfed—the mistress's children. From life to death, mammy caretook for white families.

The mammy's fatness/undesirability makes her nonthreatening to white beauty. As Sinwell explained, the asexuality here is one of erasure. The mammy is a fat black female who isn't understood as sexual because her body isn't emblematic of the kyriarchy's definition of female desirability, so she poses no threat to the white mistress or to the culture at large. In this case, the undesirability is two-fold, both her blackness and her fatness. In "The Other Side of the Looking Glass: The Marginalization of Fatness and

Blackness in the Construction of Gender Identity," feminist Andrea Shaw explains:

> As the physical embodiment of features rejected by Western beauty criteria, Mammy becomes a shadow against which white women's beauty may be contrasted. Her fleshy body specifically reinforces the patriarchy's insistence upon female slenderness and delicacy. As a dominant image of the "other," Mammy helps to sustain the interrelated and interdependent connections of economic, gendered and racial oppression by defining the opposing physical standards by which white female identity is formed. (146)

According to Shaw, the mammy figure, like many of the representations discussed here, marks blackness and fatness as Other, while at the same time reminding the viewer that acceptable femininity is in opposition to this trope: white, wealthy, slender, and at leisure. Media critic and author of *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*, Jen Posner calls the mammy a "toxic, toxic image" that is "really violent" because it denies fat back women "agency" (*Fattitude*). From a kyriarchal standpoint, the asexuality of these characters is tantamount to their continued existence because if they were "sexual, or sexualized" they would "destabilize our ideas of what is desirable" (Sinwell 166). In fact, both the hypersexuality and the asexuality that we see associated with the fat female body serves to maintain a kyriarchal understanding of acceptable femininity, because in all cases, the viewer understands that these representations are either foolish or monstrous, so they maintain the status quo, one in which fatness is unacceptable and emblematic of failure and dysfunction.

So many times, we see fat bodies in the media the messaging is overwhelmingly negative. Negative representations of fat bodies—like monsters, fools, sexual deviance,

and pathology—work to perpetuate a culture of fat-phobia and fat-hatred. *Fattitude* spends two-thirds of its ninety minutes exposing these demeaning images because they contribute to and perpetuate the culture of fat hatred.

Fat people don't want to see themselves in these negative representations. They don't want to live lives that echo these negative experiences. Over and over again when it came time to talk about fat representation in popular culture, the *Fattitude* interviewees—people who are fighting for fat civil rights in a plethora of contexts—noted that when they looked to television and other media they felt there were no representations that were emblematic of positive or even normative fatness. As James Snead notes in his writings about racism and oppression in Hollywood films, "omission" is a stratagem of oppressive representation. An act of omission manifests oppression by "precisely absence itself;" erasure from representation is an active way to perpetuate a cultural prejudice (6). Fat people who are living happy or healthy or productive or even borderline pleasant lives aren't yet truly "seeable," but the climate is changing. And *Fattitude* makes the argument that the ideal representation isn't one of utter perfection. The honest to goodness sigh of relief should come from seeing fat characters who represent an understanding of the fat body as regular, empowered by utter normativity.

Attempting to Overcome Thin-Thinking: Contemporary Fat Positive Representations

As the premise of *Fattitude* is that negative media representations of a particular group, in this case fat people, create a negative cultural climate for that group, it is imperative that I explore the texts and media moments that are positive or, at the very least, those that are understood as attempts at empowering representations of fat bodies. From the philosophic stand point of intersectional feminism, some of the representations that are currently recognized as positive or empowering for fat bodies slip into categories that could be understood as oppressive from other intersectional vantages, such as race, sexuality or gender. With this in mind, this chapter is concerned with the theoretical complexity of the solutions that are being presented by fat activists and body positive media makers.

In a sense, this chapter models feminist disability theorist Rosemary Garland-Thomson's article, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory." Garland-Thomson's article positions disability studies within the context of the "larger undertaking" of feminist identity studies by looking at how "culture saturates the particularities of bodies with meanings and then [probing] the consequences of those meanings" (1-3). Garland-Thompson explains that her "feminist disability approach" addresses "the privilege of normalcy," meaning that there is cultural value to being understood as normal that many are excluded from (4). Like those with disabilities fat people, are also excluded from the 'privilege of normalcy.' In fact, I would go as far as to say that much of what Garland-Thomson argues regarding a feminist theory that

integrates the concerns of people with disabilities could also be said of those who are fat. According to Garland-Thomson, people with disabilities are represented as asexual, monstrous, repugnant, and in need of curing – all negative representational spaces that are also projected on to fat people, as I have argued in previous chapters.

Breaking her work into four sections, representation, the body, identity and activism, Garland-Thomson is able to "confront the ways that we understand human diversity, the materiality of the body, multiculturalism, and the social formations that interpret bodily differences" (3). Each of the sections examines examples and/or artifacts like advertisements and media from culture that participate either in how we culturally define those with disabilities or look to transform current stigmatizing assumptions about those with disabilities. The sections push the reader to consider how the perceptions and realities of people with disabilities complicate preconceived notions of concepts like objectification, the ideal body, and gender identity. While executed with a different structure, this chapter echoes Garland-Thomson process of complicating some complex and widely held ideas about empowering and disempowering representations, only in this case the focus is on fat bodies rather than differently abled bodies.

The stereotypical representations that we see of fatness always render fat people as outside of what is understood as normal and this in and of itself is an oppression. I want to contend that for a scholar/activist who is hoping that the goals of social justice and fat acceptance can be achieved, the most important representations to consider are the ones that render the edges of dualistic splitting visible, representations that make it clear that the extreme stereotypes that are forwarded about fat people are assumptions not realities, and therefore allow viewers to recognize that fatness is as varied and complex as

everything else that we understand as normal. That said, the journey to being understood as part of what culture deems normal doesn't happen overnight; it requires representations that bridge the gap, representations that ask us to change our assumptions. I call representations of this nature transformational representations. Representations of a transformational nature may still be flawed, and not register as 100% percent empowered but in one way or another they are shifting the cultural consciousness towards fat acceptance.

In 2011, early on in my research about fat bodies, I was considering the fat representations in *Huge* and *Glee*. I watched *Huge* and *Glee* repeatedly, taking copious notes. The goal of this repeated viewing was to know these shows as if they were my own children, so that I might prepare an argument that left no representational stone unturned. During this process I started to think that no average viewer watches a show with this kind of intensity, so in reality the analysis that I was doing wasn't necessarily typical of the resonating effect that these fat representations would have on viewers. It occurred to me that the negative cultural signifiers often associated with fat people – such as excessive or pathological food consumption, asexuality, and/or deviant sexuality – were present in the minds of viewers long before they watched *Glee* or *Huge*. So, while these signs were present in these shows, I recognized they were not the loudest noise being made. Since neither *Glee* nor *Huge* is still being aired, agonizingly detailed examinations of these particular texts are growing inconsequential. However, there are moments in both shows that functionally show off the artifice of gender norms and moments that effectively preform this same transformative task with regard to negative and abnormalizing tropes of fat people.

The opening scene of episode one of *Huge*, "Hello, I Must be Going," crystalized the idea that something transformative can happen in the midst of other oppressive representations. As I mentioned, one of the main storylines in *Huge* is that Will Radner – a teenager who embraces fat acceptance – is sent to a weight loss camp by her fitness guru parents. Will spends most of the episodes rebelling against the camp's fat phobic mentality. In the scene that I was affected by, Will does a strip tease to rebel against a before photo – as in a photo of her before the camp solves her fat problem. Basically, Will is asked to stand around in a bathing suit in front of all the other campers, but she doesn't want to. Despite Will's complaints – the camp director insists that she strip down and get her before photo taken. Forcing a woman to reveal her body to others when she doesn't want to is a violation, one which Will refuses to take lightly. In an act of rebellion Will complies – but she does so by stepping up on a platform and performing an almost vaudevillian or burlesque style striptease. Her dancing is sexy and brings her body into clear focus for the viewer. Will is fat, yes – but she is also distinctly empowered. She fights back against her oppressor – by rendering her body, which is understood as unsightly, as thing seen, as the visual focus of the other campers' attention and also the viewer's attention. Will's body floats back and forth between thing empowered, thing oppressed and thing objectified – rendering her outside of dualism. She is not one thing; she is many. We cannot categorize her.

Because of her fatness and the fact that fat women are rendered as outside of sexual desirability, Will's impromptu strip-tease transforms the degrading nature of female bodily objectification, rendering the strip-tease as an empowered act of rebellion. As I mentioned both earlier in this chapter and the last, sometimes, *Huge* is a problematic

show. The plot centers on a weight loss camp, Camp Victory, a summer program that seeks to indoctrinate young fat people into the culture of fat-hate and dieting. The character Will Rader desperately attempts to reject this ideology, so she presents as a fairly strong representation of fat acceptance – but as I've already argued Will's fatness is repeatedly linked to her pathology so we can also understand her as in need of professional help. Without much effort we could blow the idea of *Huge* and Will as a positive representational space to smithereens. But I don't want to – because that one moment of Will's defiance is valuable. Seeing a fat woman present her self as rebelliously sexually empowered and willing to be seen matters. And that's just it you see, the road to empowerment is not perfect. It's not clean cut and easy to identify.

Will is a representation that is theoretically murky; she offers viewers no shiny penny– no clear-cut answer. This is the kind of space in which the fat body becomes what Kathleen Lebesco, fat studies scholar and professor of communications, termed the "revolting" body in her book, *Revolting Bodies?: The Struggle to Redefine the Fat Identity* (1). This is the fat body as "subversive cultural practice," fully loaded and overflowing with transformative agency (Lebesco 2). Honestly, depending on your mood you could read her as negative and/or positive, but that's real. That's normal. We don't love ourselves everyday. We are fighting for the right to love ourselves. When Will jumps on the platform and strips, she renders the fat female experience as representative of something rebellious and unruly that cannot be contained by the controlling stereotypes of the master consciousness.

Transformative representations are what we need. Ending weight bias requires a shift in the collective consciousness, a shift in cultural assumptions. Admittedly,

including more positive and less negative representations of fat people in mainstream media and social media, i.e. changing what we see, is only a piece of this puzzle – but I believe that this kind of change would mark the beginning of a much greater significant cultural change. Right now, I don't think these images need to be radiating some perfect image of social justice or fat empowerment. They need to encourage the understanding of the fat body as within the normal spectrum rather than as simply the counterpoint to the hegemonic ideal of thinness. These transformational representations need to be relatable and they need to be conscious of stigmatizing assumptions we make about fat people. Currently, normal, relatable and conscious enough to challenge stigmatizing assumptions may also be burdened with holdover ideas – diet lingo, health mongering, sexist ideals, and race-based assumptions. For example, if an advertisement features women of varying body size but they are all white women, then we aren't challenging the racist assumptions that are part of the thin beauty ideal. Or if we see a romantic comedy that features a fat woman who achieves self confidence and self-love because a fit man falls in love with her, then we aren't challenging the sexist assumption that a fat woman's value is related to the level of normative male attraction she receives. To be clear, we cannot excuse these holdovers – but we can acknowledge that these types of representations challenge what is currently understood as normal and allow us to open the door for further conversation about the kinds of images that empower all types of fat people.

To exemplify the complexity of these kinds of transformational representations, I want to examine three cultural spaces or cultural frameworks that exclude the fat bodies: beauty, health and civil rights. In response to theses oppressive spaces, fat activists, artists, entrepreneurs, psychologists, and social scientists and many others are toiling

away in an attempt to create the transformational representations fat beauty, fat fitness and fat rights.

Transforming Beauty

Sociologist and *Fattitude* interviewee, Abigail Saguy's book, *What's Wrong With Fat?* notes that idealized "beauty" is one of the cultural ideas that fat activists have identified as in need of shifting for the cultural acceptance of fat bodies to occur (54). Exclusion from beauty is exclusion from the privilege of normalcy. While discussing the cultural perception of the body disabled, Garland-Thompson explains that "normal has inflected beautiful in modernity," meaning that to be understood as normal one must conform the standard of beauty (11). This is equally true of the fat body. In response to beauty as a normalizing factor, there are members of the fat acceptance movement who believe that fat empowerment requires the incorporation of the fat body into cultural notions of the aesthetically delightful body or the body beautiful. To be clear, this conversation about perceiving the fat body as beautiful is not merely about physical appreciation; it is also about acknowledging the fat-body as sexually appealing.

According to *Framing Fat, Competing Constructions in Contemporary Culture* by Samantha Kwan and Jennifer Graves, the national association to advance fat acceptance (NAAFA) supports these notions of the fat body as beautiful, and "promotes the idea that fat can be physically attractive" and welcomes and embraces "fat admirers," who are people who "prefer romantic partners with large bodies" (35). Furthermore, many fat-activists argue that while mainstream culture does not acknowledge the inclusion of the fat-body into hegemonic understandings of body beautiful, the fat-body is in fact already a part of many individuals' understandings of what is pleasing to look at

and desirable, and it has been for centuries. Saguy notes, "while those who idealize the fat female form represent a minority in the contemporary United States, their preference was, until quite recently, the norm," consider art works such as the Venus of Willendorf and Ruben's "The Three Graces" (56). Basically, the idea is that shifting how we conceptualize ideas of 'beauty' will result in the forwarding of fat acceptance by dispelling the notion that fat is and has always been aesthetically understood as grotesque and "frightful" (Kwan and Graves 24).

Interested in exploring the nature of beauty, fashion and desirability as a factor in fat oppression and fat acceptance, for *Fattitude*, I conducted interviews with men and women who are attempting to shift the average perception of beauty from a thin-focused ideal to a broader more inclusive space. In particular, I interviewed Chastity Garner, founder of the blog *Garner Style* and the plus fashion event *CurvyCon*; Bruce Sturgell, Founder of the blog *Chubstr*; Melinda Alexander, a plus-size stylist; Alex LaRosa and Tess Holliday, both working plus-size models; Substantia Jones, founder of *Adipositivity*, a photo-activist project; and finally, Kelly Shabari, a plus-size porn star. Each of these people recognized beauty, fashion, desirability or sex appeal as an important factor in the journey towards fat acceptance.

As a feminist, it is almost a compulsory or instinctual response to question how embracing the fat body as beautiful will proceed to individual empowerment, particularly because when we discuss beauty and fatness, the conversation overwhelmingly revolves around female bodies. This statement is both true in the academy and in mass-media discussions of body positivity or body size acceptance. As I mentioned in chapter three, being beautiful is a well-documented aspect of compulsory femininity in the current

incantation of the kyriarchy and fatness is clearly understood as outside of the realm of feminine beauty privilege and female desirability. In this context, failing at beauty by being fat equates to not having feminine privilege – a privileged position which is clearly defined by its submission, considering it is dependent on male desire or at the very least the sexual desire of a partner rather than personal power. That said, I have found that, like fat women, fat men also feel that their fatness makes them undesirable or relegated to fetish-oriented spaces of desire. For example, in his interview with *Fattitude*, Emmy award winning film director and gay fat man, Ash Christian explained that his fat body is "fetishized" in the bear/cub spaces of the gay male community and while he loves that he is sexually appealing in these spaces, he often "worries" and questions if the men who desire him "only like [him] because [he's] fat?"

Also, in this context, fat women and men feel that they are unjustly excluded from the world of fashion and therefor the power to creatively self-define that comes with having a variety of clothing, boots, accessories and other accouterments readily available for purchase. Male fashionista and founder of the online male fashion blog *Chubstr*, Bruce Sturgell, noted in his interview for *Fattitude* that fashion is "personality" and "individuality" and that there is an "assumption" being made that bigger people "don't care about how they look" or that "they are not worried about presenting themselves in a certain way." Concuring with Sturgell, blogger and founder of *CurvyCon*, Chastity Garner explains that fashion matters – because "participating in life matters. Participating in the things that you enjoy matter" (Fattitude). Garner goes on to note that fashion might not matter to all but no matter what size a person "should be able to have that choice to

participate" (Fattitude). Understood in this context, participating in fashion and beauty is about self-expression, albeit in a strangely consumerist way.

Admittedly, while I fully grasp the inequality and the injustice felt by those who are denied access to beauty-privilege, I entered *Fattitude's* interviews with a perspective of my own. As a scholarly feminist, I believe that beauty – particularly in the context of kyriarchically structured sexual desire – involves objectification. From my standpoint, being an object – a thing to be looked at – is not the goal, so welcoming or ushering new body shapes into the fashionable, beautiful or sexy categories – doesn't feel like much of a success for fat bodies because it is built on a dualistic kyarichal ideal that privileges the beautiful over the unbeautiful. The idea that people need beauty privilege to earn the respect of others does not sit well with me. And yet, this type of solution is extraordinarily popular right this minute.

Consider the cover of the 2016 *Sports Illustrated* (SI) swimsuit edition, which featured a popular plus-size model named Ashley Graham. To be clear, Graham is not only in the magazine, she is on the cover. Graham's SI cover is very much representative of that which can be understood as objectifying. Graham is photographed at the beach, clad in a revealing purple and orange bikini, kneeling in the surf with her knees spread wide. The ocean water crashes around her, flooding the space between her knees, in a very sexual way. In fact, the positioning of her body is overall very sexual rather than natural. She is kneeling posed to accentuate the sexuality of her curves, breast pushed forward, backside raised, legs spread. The lighting in the image draws the viewer's eye to her cleavage, which is just barely covered by her bikini top. And, as with most images that are understood as rendering the model as an object of the viewer's desire. Graham

stares into the camera, as though she is staring into the viewer's eyes, seducing you with her look and looks.

Because of a history of images like Graham's cover photo, the SI swimsuit edition has often come under fire for its objectification of women. In early 2015, *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver* featured SI swimsuit edition in a reoccurring segment titled, "How is this Still a Thing?" This segment asks questions about inequitable cultural holdovers from the past, for example white washing in Hollywood media, dressing up as a race other than your own, or the British commonwealth games, an Olympic-like athletic competition that includes the countries that were once or still are colonies of Great Britain. In the segment dedicated to the SI swimsuit edition, the announcer explains that the SI swimsuit edition was created in 1964 to boost SI sales between sports seasons and it "was a perfect expression of the sixties…a time of rampant casual sexism" (Oliver). Also in 2015, author and psychologist, Peggy Drexler situated the SI swimsuit edition as objectifying and demeaning to women in an editorial article published by CNN, which noted that "a woman is more likely to end up on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* for her ability to look amazing in a bikini than for her accomplishments as an athlete" (cnn.com). Speaking specifically to the praise garnered by the acceptance of Graham's size as sexy and worthy of the SI swimsuit edition, journalist Marilou Johanek of the *The Toledo Blade,* writes:

> Let's not elevate the continued objectification of females as eye candy to sell magazines as progress worth praising. Buyers of the swimsuit issue don't grab copies to learn more about …the crusade of a curvaceous beauty. They want to see skin and sexy poses that push the envelope… as

> long as women are regarded as objects, they won't be seen as people worth more than what they reveal in a swimsuit. (toledoblade.com)

Despite these voices that highlight the objectifying nature of the swimsuit edition, in the mainstream media the cover image of Graham was framed as history making. *USA Today* described the choice to use Graham as a cover-girl "monumental" and "a major shift for an industry that has long held a narrow view of beauty" (usatoday.com). And, *Health.com* felt that the 2016 SI swimsuit edition was "the most body positive issue ever" (news.health.com). Admittedly, in some ways this cultural moment is historic, never before has there been a woman of Graham's size on the cover of the SI swimsuit addition. Graham is a size 16 – a size that is often available in both straight and plus-sizes and referred to by fat activists and body positive community as an inbetweenie.

In all honestly, a size 16 is unheard of in the world of mainstream fashion models, so there's that. Also, unlike most mainstream models Graham's size is more inline with the average American woman, and yet I'm not exactly sure how this image of Graham proves empowering for the average plus-size woman or man. Graham is undeniably gorgeous and she is built in a way that is akin to a traditional model only larger, meaning she is tall, hourglass-shaped, and evenly proportioned. Undoubtedly, if what Graham desires is to be photographed, then by all means she should be – and admittedly, she has accomplished something amazing. She, and other plus-size models like her, are teaching the fashion industry that the hyper-thin limitations it puts on beauty are unjustly limited and that there is profit in selling fashion to larger women.

The question becomes does one hyper-sexualized image of Graham or even repeated magazine fashion spreads featuring Graham-like models, improve fat peoples'

body image? Fat people don't look like Graham, and arguably, neither do many skinnier women who suffer from poor body image. Graham still falls with in the spectrum of the hyper-beautiful, and we are still valuing her based on this criteria. In other words, this image of Graham doesn't shift people's bias perceptions of the fat person that they pass on the street or work with at the office or any fat person. It does nothing to shift the culture's acceptable disrespect for the fat body. Instead, it offers up the idea that perhaps more female bodies are worthy of being understood as beautiful and worthy of sexual consideration than the media originally thought.

And yet, there is something ever so complicated about how theory and praxis collide where beauty is concerned. As Garland-Thompson explains, "Banishment from femininity," which arguably equates to being beautiful and sexual attractive, "can be both a liability and a benefit" (18). In her article Garland-Thompson references a 1987 issue of *Playboy* that featured Ellen Stohl, which presents a similar objectification conundrum to that of Graham on the cover of the SI swimsuit edition. According to Garland-Thompson, Stohl, a disabled woman "wrote to editor Hugh Hefner that she wanted to pose nude in *Playboy"* because she felt that disabled people struggled to be perceived of a sexy (19). Garland-Thompson explains that as a woman, Stohl felt excluded from the privilege of normalcy – sexual objectification. She writes:

> For Stohl, it would seem that the performance of feminine sexuality was necessary to counter the social interpretations that disability cancels out sexuality. This confirmation of normative heterosexuality…was the affirmation she needed as a disabled woman to be sexual at all. (Garland-Thompson 19)

This idea – that the basic denial of associating the body with a healthy sexuality or the capability of being beautiful – renders both fat people and the disabled people outside of normal, not only to onlookers but also perhaps to themselves – is a very powerful source of opression. Beauty, beauty ideals, and feeling beautiful play a significant role in terms of self-satisfaction, self-worth and personal body image. Sure, being outside the norm can afford you the freedom of not conforming but it also denies you the privilege of being understood as normal and acceptable. In other words, currently, if you're living a life in the active culture of privileges and oppressions, beauty matters. I can balk all I want about how beauty shouldn't matter, and I should and I will, but despite my fiery dedication to opening people's eyes to the oppressive role that beauty plays in Western culture, particularly for women, beauty continues to matter. So, many fat people feel that they are not–beautiful and therefore they are not worthy of respect, love or just treatment.

In light of this, the fat-activists and body positive champions with the most followers embrace beauty as a source of acceptance and empowerment; this isn't radical change. It is acceptance into a system that is based on exclusion –or rather a system that functions as us (the beautiful) and them (the ugly or careless). It is also a system that embraces the idea that women need to be beautiful and one that needs retooling. It's an old-fashioned and not all that radical idea. However – people still want to be beautiful – so beauty and fashion function as a metaphoric gatekeeper for fat acceptance. Beauty is the entryway for so many.

In particular, acceptance in the world of fashion matters and the perception of one's body shape as beautiful matters. Garland-Thompson notes that "images of disabled" and, if you will, fat "fashion models in the media can shake up the established

categories and expectations. Because commercial visual media are the most widespread and commanding sources of images in modern, image saturated culture, they have great potential for shaping public consciousness" (23). A high fashion image of a fat woman or man registers as radically transformative because it overrides dualistic stereotypes by fusing "two previously antithetical visual discourses," fatness and beauty (Garland-Thompson 23). Such an image would therefore "shake up our assumptions about the normal and the abnormal" (Garland-Thompson 24).

Almost as if acknowledging the power of the fashion industry to shape and reshape public consciousness, *Fattitude* interviewee, Virgie Tovar dedicated an entire section of her book *Hot and Heavy: Fierce Fat Girls on Life, Love and Fashion* to essays on the role that fashion plays in the oppression and empowerment of fat women. The section features six essays each one very different from the next but the general consensus is the same –I was denied access to fashion and beauty, and it mattered. For example, in her essay, "Something Fabulous to Wear," Margret Howe explains "Nothing focuses the mind on the problem of a fat teenage female body like trying to find clothes for it…Dressing my impossible body filled me… with shame… it just served to remind me that I wasn't desirable at the base level of being a consumer. Even when I had money to spend no one wanted to take it (204). In this context being ushered in to the world of fashion and beauty isn't about desirability to others as much as it is about social acceptability and functionality. It's about feeling culturally valued.

Another essay, "On Dressing Up: A Story of Fashion Resistance," by Kristy Fife explains that images that feature fat fashion and understand the fat body as worthy of beauty and fashion "showed [her] that there was nothing wrong with [her] body" (192).

In this case, fashion functions as an eye opener for Fife, enabling her to see beyond the limitations that the kyriarchy puts on the fat body. Fife also explains that "fashion is often held up as frivolous, conformist, unnecessary and capitalist engaged, with in both fat-positive and feminist circles, scholarship and activisms," but she rejects this noting that fashion and participation in the beauty culture is a "survival strategy" for her, "and the most important way of negotiating [her] relationship with [her] body" (194).

So, in praxis beauty and fashion have meaning for the fat body. Participating in the spaces that feminism often registers as part and parcel with objectification and female submission is one of the ways that fat women create transformation and enter into a practice of exploring the limitations that cultural assumptions and dualistic stereotypes place on fat bodies. Beauty is a space that fat people are denied and by embodying beauty and fatness, fat people feel empowered and become a "radical political mechanism," resisting the daily oppressions that tell them they are undesirable at the most basic levels (Fife 194). In praxis, exploring fat beauty is often an act of reclaiming a body that is understood as public property, in the sense that the culture renders the fat body outwardly judged and condemned.

Attempting to walk the line between theory and praxis, *Fattitude* embraces a handful of body positive spaces that have to do with beauty. Obviously, praise for being on the cover of the SI swimsuit edition didn't resonate as a transformational solution to me – but the modeling work of Tess Holliday and Substantia Jones's photo activism project *Adipositivity* are two examples of representational media that outside of the fat experience can be understood as objectifying – but in the context of fat oppressions are rendered empowering and normalizing.

Tess Holliday's modeling career and social media success are a resonant example of how beauty can function as a space for transformational change with regards to fat acceptance. Holliday has over a million social media followers and in May of 2015, Holliday was on the cover of *People Magazine,* and called the world's first plus size supermodel. In terms of media representation, what is interesting about Holliday is that she is an anomaly, even in her industry. Holliday is five foot five, covered in tattoos and a size 22. This is not your average model or plus-size model. Holliday is the first size 22 woman to get a modeling contract and she has over two million social media followers on multiple social media outlets.

In general, plus-size models present long smooth, toned bodies, and skin that has been cleared of blemish through the magic of Photoshop. With regard to models built like Graham, theorists, such as Deborah Sarbin and Sandra Brown, have called the nature of *plus-sized* into question. In her article "An Obscure Middle Ground: Size acceptance narratives and photographs of 'real women,'" Brown explains famous full-bodied women "are of 'average size,' or smaller, which is to say approximately an American size 14 or 16, or smaller" (Brown 247). The point Brown is making is that *plus-sized* models are not representative of the truly fat body and by that I mean the women who buy clothes in *plus-size* departments. Plus-size departments start at a size 14W. When interviewed on *The Ellen Show,* plus size model Amy Lemons explained that any model over a size six is considered *plus-sized*. So, arguably the *plus-size* models/actresses that are most often represented in fashion magazines and on television are not *plus-size*. In fact, it is possible that they are thinner than the average woman. Many of the women fall into the modeling industry's plus-sized category – larger than a six – are smaller then the average

American woman, who wears "between a misses size 16-18," a size that "corresponds to a women's plus size 20W," according to a study of 5,500 women conducted by the department of apparel, merchandising, design and textiles at Washington State University (Christel &Dunn).

It is also worth noting that when women who weigh more than the models we often see photographed are represented, their ripples, bulges, bumps and cellulite are eliminated from view. In other words, as much of their fatness as humanly possible is eliminated from view. Brown tells us that "photographs of the subject of size acceptance narratives so rarely allow the reader-viewer the opportunity a clear look at the average size body" (248), and Sarbin acknowledges the tendency to obscure the true nature of the fat body in her article "The Short Happy Life of Plus-size Women's Fashion Magazines." She explains, "Those … who are inarguably, recognizably fat – whose size would immediately jump to mind as a defining characteristic – have a different relation to our bodies. It's not only about having bigger hips that the size 2 models I see in *Vogue*; it's about having a nonstandard, even an unacceptable body (Sarbin 242). The true appearance of the 'unacceptable body' is eliminated.

This reality – the reality of the 'unacceptable body' is exactly the body that Holliday represents, and it's what Holliday embraces about herself. Unlike most plus-size models, such as Lemons and Graham, Holliday's body is not a traditional model's body in a larger size. She's not 5'9 with a flat tummy, only a size 22. She's round and undulating. She cannot easily be smoothed or re-touched to look akin to a thin aesthetic. She is a fat woman with rolls/curves in unheralded places. Holliday is not the sole representative in current popular media of this 'unacceptable body.' One could argue that

actresses/cover girls like Lena Dunham and Amy Shumer are also taking on this notion by revealing their tummy rolls and their cellulite thighs to the camera, however, like many of the plus models I've discussed, both these women fall into the smaller than the average American woman category, whereas Holliday is an unquestionable representative of the struggle for body acceptance in a body that is beyond the average.

In a very general sense, Holliday's success in and of itself –her social media followers, her many media appearances –push fat acceptance and body positivity into the limelight constantly and that alone is transformational because the conversation is being given a voice at the table. And, as we know seeing a representation and voicing an idea is half the battle. Furthermore, Holliday is engaged with the ideas of the fat acceptance movement. She founded the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag in 2013 and according to an interview with Marie Southard Ospina of *Bustle*, "She's been reminding a lot of folks that you can be badass beauty queens since way before 'body positivity' became the trendy buzzword" (Bustle.com). In other words, Holliday is regularly putting herself out there vocally and physically as an example of the reality that beauty and fatness can occur in the same space and many people find this empowering.

Understanding her body as beautiful empowers Holliday to regularly post pictures of herself partially nude, in skimpy lingerie or bikinis. A brief glance at her instagram makes this clear, but also she was part of a *Simply Be* marketing campaign in 2015, entitled #simplybekini. The campaign featured a video that opened with a screen shot of the words, "How to Get a Bikini Body" and instrumental music that harkens to surf, sun and the beach boys (simplybe.co.uk). Then, the video cuts to Holliday in a bright pink dress, her large arms exposed, and she doesn't talk but rather in a campy style she silently

put her index finger to her chin to show that she was thinking and then ta-da; she's figured it out. Holliday walks of the screen the video cuts to a frame of the words "Put a Bikini on Your Body" and then Holliday returns in a black and white bikini (simplybe.co.uk). There is no attempt to hide her size or her shape. Her stomach is round and full; she rolls at the waist. She holds up a sign that features the hashtag #simplybekini and then the video cuts to a frame that reads, "You can wear one too" (simplybe.co.uk).

Unlike Graham in SI swimsuit edition – this campaign seeks to transform the status quo. When it comes to bikinis, nakedness and ideas of beauty, most images of nude or partially nude women fall under the purview of Berger's male gaze and adhere to our culture's stringent hyper white, hyper thin beauty ideals. Unfortunately, this ideal dictates many women's understanding of their self-worth. Basically, women take in thousands upon thousands of images that feature one type of person, and this sends the message that if they don't meet this ideal that they are seeing then they don't deserve to be seen; and they certainly should never be naked or in a bikini in front of a camera.

In the #simplybekini campaign, Holliday isn't a body shape we see often in the context of beauty in the mainstream media, and her shape isn't anything like the average model and she is in a bikini with no shame. Holliday isn't stripping down to perpetuate the male gaze. She is stripping down to say hey you, fat viewer/consumer you can buy this product too; you can look beautiful in a bikini and enjoy the summer sun and pool too. Even though this is an advertisement and its goal is to sell products, images like this, images of female nakedness that challenge this stringent beauty ideal are fierce, and most defiantly radical because they work to normalize the 'unacceptable body.'

Holliday credits seeing naked photos of her body and simply recognizing the absence of the grotesque as part of her journey towards self-acceptance. When asked by Kelsey Miller in an interview for *Refinery29* if there was a turning point in her journey towards self-acceptance, Holliday replied:

> I think it was the first time I shot nude. One of my old friends shot me in her bathtub for a plus-size French online magazine called *Volup*. She put a filter on the photos, but she didn't Photoshop my body, and it was the first time I had seen my fat rolls like that — that I had seen my belly. I remember looking at the photos and thinking, 'Oh, I don't look that bad. I actually look pretty good naked.' It was those photos that really made me feel comfortable.

Literally, seeing media of herself and recognizing the potential for beauty helped Holliday shift from self-hatred to self acceptance. Furthermore, Holliday perceives the images she posts as transformational for others because if they can recognize beauty in her body, then they might recognize beauty – and in turn self worth – in themselves. In her *Fattitude* interview Holliday explained:

> [Recently] I had a photo shoot, and I had a harness, and I wore thigh highs for the first time, and I felt so sexy and I posted the picture and there's probably, I don't know, 9,000 comments on it right now just going back and forth of people saying how gross I am. But I know for every person that thinks I'm gross or whatever, there's someone that, their wheels are turning and they're thinking, like "She can do it, I can do it." Or, you know, "Maybe, maybe that's okay." (Fattitude)

And she's right. In response to her interviews, photos and social media posts, Holliday often receives comments that harken to her transformational power. Fans regularly comment to Holliday via social media noting she "changed" their lives, that she is "such an amazing person to look up to," that she inspires "daily courage," and that seeing her allowed for the realization "that being big is fun and fashionable" (Ospina Bustle.com).

In a similar way to Holliday and others using beauty and fashion as resistant power, *Fattitude* considers the work of Substantia Jones of *The Adipositivity Project* a transformational solution. In her interview with *Fattitude,* Jones explained that *The Adipositivity Project*, is "a body positivity campaign focusing on encouraging heath and wellbeing through acceptance of benign human variation. And I do that by having fat people take their clothes off for my camera. I have hundreds of photographs of fat women and men and couples on the website." Unlike, images of a particular woman, like Holliday, Jones's images are particularly powerful because they are so inclusive. Jones photographs fat individuals from all races and couples of all sexual orientations.

Jones's images are most often nudes: fat women in lingerie, from behind, from below, seated, sprawled on the floor; naked fat queer black women kissing, their breasts long, their rolls multiple; a fat man from knees to waist, his round fat belly hovering above his flaccid penis, his thigh pressed against the thigh of his lover; tattoos on fat, back rolls, butts and arms and thighs; all artistically rich; all visually beautiful. No one is Photoshopped to look less fat, everyone has their stretch marks and their cellulite and they are still glorious. Perhaps, one might note that the lines are not sleek or contemporary, but they are rhythmic and voluminous and nothing short of stunning.

The Adipositivity Project, like Holliday's images of herself, serves to

transform viewers and empower them – even if it doesn't quite yet shift the cultural paradigm. Jones explains that she began her project thinking global cultural change and happily realized the need for fat acceptance on an individual level:

> I wonder[ed] if I [could] change people's perspective of fat people by showing them photographs of fat people… And that's not really what happened. What instead happened was I learned it was the fat people themselves who needed this because that's who I heard from and that's who I ended up speaking to, the people who wrote me and still write me. Almost everyday, I hear from people who tell me about body shame and tell me about the therapeutic use that they use the Adipositivity Project for. (Fattitude)

Fat people looking at Jones' beautiful naked fat people feel relief. They are overcome with emotion because they are no longer understanding bodies like theirs in the context of the unacceptable, un-seeable, undesirable, unbeautiful, unwanted and shameful.

In the case of the fat body fashion/nudity/modeling/embracing beauty is empowered because it spits in the face of the social moré that says fat people shouldn't exist — that their bodies are too grotesque to be looked upon. The nudity in the images from *The Adipositivity Project* is an active statement. They say look at me. See me. Know that I'm human, that I exist, and that I refuse to be invisible. Know that I can be beautiful — that beauty doesn't have to be limited and hollow. Know that it can mean so many things. This is a radical act and a revolution against an oppressive beauty regime. These images of nudity are powerful because they are not just asking the viewer to look, but also to think and to change.

Beauty exists, it will continue to exist, and it is culturally charged — particularly when it comes to how culture envisions women but also men. And as far as I'm concerned using that charge to reshape ideas is a powerful tool. Transformational images of beauty are needed to empower change. During her interview with *Fattitude*, Rebecca Phul noted that as a group fat people experience "the issue of internal invasion of weight bias," that unlike most people experiencing racial bias or gender bias, many fat people feel bias towards members of their own group. Phul explains why this is so, noting that "one of the reasons that we see this is because self-blame is so common and when we think about all of the messages in our society that are perpetuating bias, there really are no voices challenging that or combatting that. And so, it's very easy for people to internalize bias" (Fattitude). In other words, the culture teaches people that their fatness is a direct result of their failure to pursue thinness, so they feel shame about it and they project this understanding of fat as weakness or failure or undesirability on to other fat people rather than embrace them as a fellow suffer of unchecked bias. So, many fat people buy into the negative ideas the culture has about them and they buckle under the burden of their oppression – rather than fight for their right to cultural respect. Of course, one of the things that fat people believe is that they are unbeautiful and therefore unworthy of being seen or respected.

Because of internalized weight bias, it is almost as if fat activists are starting their fight from behind enemy lines. In a climate of so much self-hatred and self blame – eradicating an individual's relationship to self-hatred is a process. This is why beauty transformations are necessary. Creating a space where it becomes transparent that the beauty ideal is a lie, a space that allows people to realize that beauty and fatness are not

in polar opposition may just be the first hurdle in the fight for fat acceptance. Garland-Thompson explains that media focuses on representations of othered consumers – such as people with disabilities and fat people – can invoke an "inherently disruptive potential" (27). One that allows for the ushering of the othered into the "normative public sphere" (Garland-Thompson 25).

Perhaps how we build the radical army of change – the coalition of fat activists who are willing to fight for fat justice –is by first rendering them beautiful. Maybe feeling beautiful is necessary before you can be angry that the culture lied and told you beauty wasn't available to you? Maybe that lie will drive people to wonder what other lies they are being told? For many realizing that fat oppression exists is a process. First, it is about the self and then, it is about the culture. Transformational beauty is a lot about self. It's about looking at an image – an alternative image, an image counter to what the mainstream is selling about the beauty ideal and being open enough to recognize beauty is bigger and fatter than you realized. It's about realizing worth is not dependent on size. It's about realizing your worth is not dependent on your size. It's about wondering why you thought it was.

The thing about the transformational beauty solutions that I've discussed here is that they are not explicit. They don't tell you what to think. They are representations – mostly photos – that are reestablishing the norms of what is beautiful to include fatness, even though the kyriarchal framework swore that fat and beauty could not be synonymous. They are not without flaw, and they are theoretically complicated when it comes to the nature of intersectionality and the many faceted elements of oppression – but in their own way they render a hole in the kyriarchal reality – a space where the

dualistic extremes set up by the beauty idea become transparent, allowing people to see that the notion that fat is undesirable and unbeautiful is substantially about the types of bodies that gets represented positively.

Transforming Health

Like beauty, understandings and representations of health are dictated by the kyriarchal framework and as a general consensus fatness is understood as a marker of illness or the unhealthy body caused by a lack of self-discipline and self respect. The kyarichal framework forwards a hegemonic version of health, which fails to consider the many factors that come together to foster an individual's health or lack of health. An inclusive vision of health requires a definition of health that considers the many intersectional oppression that individuals face.

The *Canadian Women's Health Network* (CWHN) defines health by embracing what they call a "comprehensive feminist approach to health" (www.cwhn.ca). On their website CWHN explains the intersectional intricacies that are understood by a comprehensive feminist approach to health and overlooked by a hegemonic kyarichal definition of health:

> While biomedicine is a mechanistic concept of the body that divides the individual into a collection of component parts, the comprehensive approach is based on a conception of the human being as a whole (body and mind) interacting with their social and physical environment. Thus, this approach defines health in a holistic way, as the result of social relationships. In contrast to a homogenizing vision of health, the comprehensive feminist approach advocates the recognition of the physiological and social differences between the sexes, while at the same

> time recognizing the differences between individuals, both women and men. This acknowledgement of a person's many different characteristics — whether they are a man or a woman, rich or poor, gay or straight, living with a disability or not, etc. — is called intersectionality. According to the comprehensive feminist approach, in order to improve health, the social determinants of health must be taken into account; these are the factors that have the greatest impact on health, such as income, employment and housing…Health is a matter of social justice. (www.cwhn.ca)

In other words, Western culture's dominant understandings of health, currently favor those whom kyarichy privileges and health status is often defined in this context. In reality, health is not a one size fits all concept. A person's health is a very intimate and individual experience, an intricate balance of what is best for the mind, body and spirit. The CWHN's definition of a 'comprehensive feminist approach to health' makes note of attributes that are often excluded from kyriarchical considerations of health status – like gender, race, sexuality and economic status – and we can easily add body size and weight stigma to this list of attributes overlooked and understudied.

In general, the kyriarchical Western culture equates fatness with a lack of health. This understanding of fatness is the foundation for medicalization of the fat body and the use of terms like obesity and the obesity epidemic as well as an active ingredient in the success of the diet industry. From the perspective of the fat acceptance movement, this understanding of the fat-body as "unhealthy" is problematic because it does not register or take into account the diversity of body size, individual metabolic complexity, the spiritual and mental health of a fat individual, or the complex social and economic factors

that may be a play in regards to body size, for example the expense of nutrient rich foods versus low cost of intentionally addictive nutrient-less fast foods or junk foods.

Fat activists recognize the alternative viewpoint that frames health in a similar context as CWHN's 'comprehensive feminist approach to health,' understanding a individual's health as a deeply personal status, that is directly correlated to his or her intersectional experiences – both social and economic. According to Kwan and Graves, "the basic tenet of this idea is that "fat does not always signify a lack of health" (62). Equating thinness and health overlooks the health risks and ineffectiveness associated with dieting (Bacon 2010). And, as NAAFA argues "a thin person who overeats and fails to exercise will likely experience the same health problems as an overweight or obese person who engages in these unhealthy behaviors" (Kwan and Graves 63). Basically, what we are talking about here is a failure in the scientific community based on assumption and bias. Culturally, the western world doesn't like fat people and so we render science that accentuates reasons to promote dieting and dismisses the evidence that shows weight loss might not be the catchall solution it's presented as. The association for size diversity and health (ASDAH) has made a wonderful video called *Poodle Science* that uses poodles and mastiffs as a metaphor from how science perceives the fat body. This video can be found on *Youtube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=H89QQfXtc-k)*. The argument is that rather than realize that like dogs, human beings come in a multitude of "breeds" or shapes and sizes and those variations result in varied lifespans and illnesses, we continue to blame fat people for their genetic make up. Basically, ASDAH is arguing that like the mastiff will never be a

poodle, a fat person will never be a thin person and that's okay. Fat people can still live happy, joy-filled, healthy lives – if we would stop oppressing them.

In response to some fat activists perception that a fat body can live a happy healthy life, Saguy recognizes a secondary space where activists are creating solutions – and she calls it the "Heath at Every Size" frame (49). According to the Health at Every Size movement the goal should not be a thin body but rather "People of all sizes should learn to eat in response to internal cues and to exercise for its intrinsic benefits" (Seguy 30). Basically, Health at Every Size posits that we should question and restructure current hegemonic notions of bodily health, so as to free the fat body from the oppression of being perceived of as unhealthy and to awaken or re-awaken the possibility that thinness can be a marker for varied states of health.

Admittedly, the Health at Every Size movement is much more rooted in treatment for eating disorder and other psychological elements of health than it is to people creating representations, however it is still worth considering what types of representational moments are transformational and linked to this attempt to shift people away from thin-centric ideas about health. Right now, from a representational standpoint, the culture is flooded with images that underscore the idea that fat people are understood as unhealthy and thin people are assumed healthy.

Diets don't work. In *Secrets from the Eating Lab: The Science of Weight Loss, the Myth of Will Power, and Why you Should Never Diet Again,* a treaty on decades of studying the psychology and biology of eating patterns, Traci Mann, professor for the University of Minnesota's Health and Eating Lab, notes that "The CEOs and obesity researchers who support… diets are not technically lying when they say diets are

effective, because diets do lead to weight loss in the short term. But there are two problems with saying these diets work: people don't lose enough weight and they don't keep it off' (Ch. 1). Mann's book repeats this fact over and over again, citing her own work and the research of a plethora of other scientists and yet despite extensive research and medical studies that show there is no true prescription for long term weight loss, people continue to believe that thinness can always be achieved – and that achieving thinness is a function of dedication, hard work, and will power.

In her interview with *Fattitude* activist Sonya Renee Taylor explained that "the system is so diabolically brilliant," because it keeps "convincing people that they can figure out a way to achieve [thinness]… so that's what keeps people from fighting against it …they actually think they can win at it, which is why you see… this absurd lifelong yo-yo dieting." In other words, even strong willed, devoted people, who have repeatedly failed at weight loss refuse to acknowledge that devotion to molding the body into what is emblematic of thinness and all the privilege that would entail is futile.

Unfortunately, this belief that anyone can achieve thinness implies that those who haven't attained it aren't trying hard enough. In this context, fat people are marked, stigmatized as those not committed enough, not diligent enough to deserve basic respect or social and cultural privilege. Taylor told *Fattitude* how the system of fat oppression works based on the belief that people can "cash in [their] thin privilege" and they have "all these things we're striving for that are part of that system. And because that system has convinced us that all of it is created on meritocracy, right, it's actually about how much you try. So of course nobody actually wants to feel like they're failures, we keep running on the hamster wheel." Much like women can feel comfortable and comforted by

believing that they can achieve the oppressive feminine ideals that a sexist world-view prescribes, fat people have bought into the myth of attainable ideal thinness and the legitimacy of weight bias. In light of this many people resist Health at Every Size ideas because they still want to be part of the "beautiful" and the "healthy" – which are arguably the same thing – part of the privileged bodies that are understood as normal.

The misnomer that thinness is achievable and necessary is brutally underscored by daily headlines that cry out the evils of deadly obesity and shows like *The Biggest Loser*, which present the idea that achieving thinness is necessary at all costs. To rebut this misnomer and create representational solutions that transform how we think about fat health – and health in general – we need to need to reconstruct how we define and consider health. And honestly, if we are going to create a world in which fat people are respected, we need to shift so that one's health status does not define the level of respect that an individual deserves.

Even while I sit here writing about people who look to transform how we perceive the link between body-type and health, I am left wondering why health matters at all. On her personal blog, Virgie Tovar, *Fattitude* interviewee and one of the nation's leading experts on fat discrimination writes:

> There is a pre-existing discourse around health that has a history mired in racism, sexism, and ableism. There is incredible cultural impetus to be "healthy" and "health" is framed in the United States as a personal/individual responsibility rather than a federal one. So, when we bring a discourse of health into fat community it already has preexisting

> capital and meaning; it already has the weight of social mores on its side. (virgietovar.com)

Tovar's point is that one of the reasons that fat people look to be defined as healthy is because the culture already registers *healthy* as a space of exclusive privilege within the kyriarchy. So, pursuits of acceptance within the constructs of what is perceived of as health function in a similar way as the fat person's pursuit of entry and acceptance into the beauty idea. Being understood as healthy or beautiful may allow fat people to gain privilege – and yet achieving such a goal does nothing to dismantle how the system positions the unbeautiful and the unhealthy as subjects of oppressions.

That said, like beauty – in praxis people pursue health. They worry about health; they fear for their health and feel debilitating stress regarding their health; however, unlike the solution oriented transformational representations that allow us to realize that beauty is variable, representations of health or being healthy and understanding fatness as healthy are elusive – because you can't always see what healthy looks like. In fact, I'm not even sure that if I asked ten people to define health that their answers would be the same. Sometimes healthy is eating a salad and going for a run. Sometimes illness is eating a salad and going for a run. Sometimes healthy is sharing a pint of ice cream with a friend and other times illness is sharing a pint of ice cream with a friend. Sometimes fat people are healthy and thin people aren't.

With an eye towards solutions in health representation, *Fattitude* interviewed Isabel Foxen Duke, nutritional coach and founder of *Stop Fighting Food*, Ragan Chastain, intellectual and author of the blog *Dances with Fat;* Janette DePattie, exercise coach and author of *The Fat Chick Works Out;* Kai Hubbard, reformed *Biggest Loser*

contestant. In all of these cases the goal of the discussion was to decipher what fat health looked like and what it would look like in representations. In general, these women felt there was a need for bodily diversity – regarding race, size and ability in representations of happy and healthy, particularly with regard to being active and eating comfortably without shame, both in private and in public.

In response to this I researched the globe for fat women and men who were practicing Health at Every Size and using social media or other platforms to create representations that countered the messages of fat equals death with representations that showed things like fat equals happy, fat equals fit, and fat equals healthy. In general, I found that solution oriented representations of health are in flux but they can be as simple as images of the fat body in motion because just seeing figures that present fatness as active rather than passive empowers and has the potential to be transformational. For example, Jessamyn Stanley, a fat yogi and Instagram star, who regularly posts images of her fat body in complex yoga poses. Stanley may not always get into questions of how she defines her relationship with health and body acceptance in her captions; however purely seeing her fat body exemplifying qualities that are rarely associated with fatness – flexibility, strength, grace, endurance, and beauty – can begin to dismantle largely held assumptions about the relationship between health and fatness.

Unfortunately, representations of fat health – are often plagued by diet lingo, conversations about optimal health and a constant undercurrent of fat bias. The issue that arises most often when people attempt to create representations of fatness as healthy is a dualistic splitting or rather the good fatty/bad fatty dichotomy. In her interview with *Fattitude*, Chastain explained:

> If fat people are doing the right things, based on whatever whoever is judging us, thinks are the right things, then those [fat people] deserve to be treated a little bit better than the bad fatties who refuse to participate in [the right things]… And so media and popular culture really reinforces that idea of like this is a good fatty, you can root for them. Like, this person is on the *Biggest Loser* and they're being mentally and physically abused for profit and to win money, but like root for that fat person, but like this fat person over here, you know, is a plus-sized model and she is very happy with her body and she's wearing a fatkini, she's bad, bad, bad and we've got to put that down because she's promoting obesity by existing in a fat body. (Fattitude)

In other words, often there is a cultural acceptance of fat people who are actively striving towards becoming thin people or who are exercising and eating nutrient rich foods. In turn fat people who do not do these things and accept themselves are regarded as bad or unworthy of society's respect. On the radical activist website *The Body is Not an Apology,* which was created by *Fattitude* interviewee, Sonya Renee Taylor, writer Gillian Brown explains that the good fatty/bad fatty dichotomy is about continued rejection of the fat body, "Rather than saying that it is OK to be fat, the 'good' fatty/'bad' fatty phenomenon emphasizes the idea that it is *not* OK to be fat. Indeed, it is *so* not OK that if you or somebody else is fat, they had better be making up for their fatness in a way that shows they are not happy with it." So, a good fatty works to compensate for their fatness or has a compensating reason for their fatness and a bad fatty is a fat person who just

lives and accepts their fat body. Obviously, this dichotomy works to maintain the cultural structure of weight bias.

Regularly, representations of fat people who are perusing personal health are overshadowed by the ideas of 'making up for their fatness' or a distaste for fatness. Consider The *TLC* show, *My Big Fat Fabulous Life*, a reality show starring Whitney Way Thore, a fat woman who weighs close to 400lbs and suffers from polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). It is worth noting that throughout the lifetime of the show, Thore's PCOS is used to construct an understanding of her as a good fatty. The announcement that Thore has PCOS is part of the show's introduction, as is the idea that PCOS makes weight loss complicated and so the audience categorizes Thore as fat for medical reasons, rather than just fat. Fat for medical reasons mitigates the moral value of one's fatness, meaning the fat body is understood as beyond the individual's control rather than a product of the individual's less than acceptable behaviors. Right out of the gate viewers understand Thore as a 'good fatty.'

Furthermore, in *My Big Fat Fabulous Life* Thore is constantly cast as struggling with her health and her diet. For example, in season 2 one of the storylines is Thore's battle to change her diet so that she doesn't become pre-diabetic. In reality pre-diabetes is pretty much like being pre-pregnant. In other words, you are not diabetic at all. That is not to say that one shouldn't take this seriously, but people of all shapes and sizes are diagnosed as pre-diabetic; it is not specific to fatness. So, making this the focus of a show about a fat woman serves to underscore the correlation between fat bodies and illness, when this exact issue could happen to a person of any size. In these episodes pre-diabetes is represented as a life/or death issue. There are tears, drama, tense fearful facial

expressions; there are scales and nutritionists and there is the overarching feeling that Thore's body size is the primary cause of her elevated blood sugar. In season 2 episode 1, "Whitney's Back," Thore is informed that her A1C blood sugar is 6.4 and she immediately reflects this back on herself, saying, "There's no room to wait another week to start a diet, there's no room to fail a little bit…I don't have any room to fail anymore" (Calvert). Again, as a theorist I find myself wondering why we always cast the fat person as personally failing at health and very rarely create representations of thin people with these same issues.

That said, like the other representations discussed here, *My Big Fat Fabulous Life* also has fearless transformational moments. For example, in the same episode, "Whitney's Back," Thore goes with a friend to a bicycle shop called "Recycle" (Calvert). While in the shop Thore's friend says he is going to get her to ride a bike. Thore responds that her body physically interferes with riding a bike. Literally, her body renders her incapable of participating in so-called *healthy* activity. The shot focuses on Thore who holds on to the counter and physically grabs her belly to show that it gets in the way when she tries to pump her knees. The shopkeeper says he can customize a bike that would work for her. Thore's reaction is to be doubtful, but she orders the bike anyway. The moment is a very powerful example of the reality of living in a fat body and the kinds of accommodations that one needs to participate in activities that have been deemed *healthy*. The moment also radiates Thore's body confidence and acceptance, as she calls attention to her belly – an area of the body that fat people are supposed to feel shame about, not draw attention to.

In the closing scene of the episode, Thore gleefully cheers for herself and rides her bike and says, “I feel incredible!” (Calvert). For the viewer, Thore’s moment on the bike is joy-inspiring. Like Will’s striptease in *Huge*, this moment overrides the other moments in the episode. The other moments are familiar – they are the same old story, the negative messaging around the fat body that is literally weighing down fat people, causing them to be unescapably burdened by their own failure – and then there is this moment of exuberant joy that reminds the viewer that fat people can have that – joy. They can have it while doing something physical, something aerobic and good for the heart. This isn’t a moment when Thore’s activity comes off as part of her fight to be a good fatty – although in many ways it is framed that way. Instead the viewer is caught up in her joy and the freedom that Thore feels having access to participating in an activity that she loves, which had been off limits based on a lack of accommodation. This is a moment where Thore’s feelings of triumph and success are not about changing her fat body but rather enjoying it. She’s on a bike made for her body; she’s using her body; she excels at it, and she’s thrilled.

According to Janette DePattie, a body positive exercise coach and Health at Every Size advocate:

> Normally, when a fat person is exercising on TV, it's the before part of the cycle… And there is some magic after coming where they're gonna look totally different and everything is gonna be perfect. So usually they look miserable, they're sweating, and they're red-faced, they're panting. They just look like they would rather be doing anything else. I have some big people in my classes and they are hooting and howling and having a good

> time. So this notion of how people look on TV is not really the reality of how fat people look when they exercise. (Fattitude)

Escaping from the normative vision of 'miserable,' 'sweating,' 'red-faced' realm of the fat person exercising to the 'hooting and howling' reality is what is so powerful about watching Thore ride her bike. Because DePattie is right, in the mainstream culture, we rarely represent active happy fat bodies. The assumption and presented reality is that all fat people hate *healthy* foods and *healthy* activity so when we see a fat person enjoying either of these things, honestly and without abandon – we have tripped once again into a space that pulls back the veil of dualistic stereotyping and renders the transformational truth that fat people can be active, graceful, physical and health-oriented. Unfortunately, sometimes this truth is drowning in the good fatty/bad fatty dichotomy.

At the end of the day, shifts in how we perceive the relationship between health and fatness are not yet truly trickling down into the mainstream media. There are not a plethora of examples to explore, however empowered fat heath activists are alive and active on the internet. In this vein there are a slew of fat athletes – fat runners, fat dancers and fat dance troupes, fat yogis, fat swimmers and fat triathletes and more, who maintain active, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram feeds that feature pictures of them doing things that the mainstream media renders either impossible or unfathomable for the fat body, and they are doing these things all while radiating joy.

Some examples of fat athletes are Louise Green of the Body Exchange who has opened a chain of gyms in Canada for fat people that are focused on shame-free fitness rather than weight loss, Julie Creffield of *The Fat Girl's Guide to Running* who has created an online platform that specifically targets and advises fat runners without

mentioning body change; or *The Big Ballet*, a dance troupe comprised of fat dancers who gracefully perform ballet without even a hint of satire. All of these people are examples of the reality that the fat body can be active and pursue health at every size. Their existence and the images they post are tirelessly working to transform how our culture perceives and conceptualizes notions of health and to normalize the notion of fat health.

Transforming Injustice

Beyond transforming how we perceive beauty and health there is a third and final space where we see solutions for the oppressions that fat people face, "fat rights" (Saguy 61). Like the activists and solutions already mentioned, activists who are pursuing solutions that speak to 'fat rights' are pushing for a dynamic shift in how the dominant culture conceptualizes the fat body, only in this case the shift is systemic (61). In other words, in some ways the argument for 'fat rights' tosses off notions of cultural acceptability – like healthy and beauty – and registers fatness as in existence and therefore deserving of equal treatment. The goal here isn't the assimilation of the fat body into current cultural and kyriarchal ideologies but rather the recognition of fat-hate and fat-phobia as a systemic prejudice that results in unjustified categorical discrimination. Basically, solutions of this nature know that fatness is not an acceptable justification for unequal or disrespectful treatment and note that "we need to combat fat bias and weight bias discrimination in employment, public spaces, health care, and elsewhere" (Saguy 30).

During her interview with *Fattitude*, Chastain explained what she means by fat civil rights and in general it is a good definition:

> When I talk about fat civil rights, what I mean is that my body size shouldn't determine the quality of care I get. My ability to access public spaces should not determine my ability to get a job and be hired and paid and promoted based on my skill and not my body size.

In other words, fat civil rights – like all civil rights – speaks to the ending of the unjust treatment that fat people experience just because they are fat. Currently, western culture hardly thinks in terms of fat civil rights. Systemic weight bias is either largely unnoticed or dismissed despite its prevalence in spaces of everyday need and service. For example, fat people experience bias from medical practitioners. According to "Implicit and Explicit Anti-Fat Bias among a Large Sample of Medical Doctors by BMI, Race/Ethnicity and Gender" a study conducted by Janice Sabine et al. that looked at the "pervasiveness of negative attitudes" about fat people and weight among medical practitioners, research has shown that "More than one third of these physicians characterized obese patients as weak-willed, sloppy and lazy" and 45% of a sample of physicians "agreed that they have a negative reaction to obese individuals" (journals.plos.org). During her interview with *Fattitude*, Chastain explained that her personal experience with medical care was in line with these statistics. She said:

> Pretty often when I go to the doctor, I'm diagnosed as fat and prescribed weight loss no matter what. I went for strep throat, I remember, to urgent care and the doctors told me I should lose weight … I've been prescribed weight loss for a separated shoulder, a broken toe, … I don't mean like my pinky toe is broken, I mean like my big toe was at a 90-degree angle

pointing at the other toes on my foot and the doctor wouldn't treat it at all until I agreed to go to a seminar on weight loss surgery.

What Chastain is describing is bias. The treatment she has received places the doctor's dislike or disagreement with her fat body before her acute need for medical care.

In addition to subpar medical care, fat people suffer other systemic injustices. For example, fat people struggle to find clothes that fit, in classrooms fat students are not always provided desks suitable to their body shape, and fat people of all ages may not fit in the seat on an airplane, in a theater or any number of public venues. Rather than perceive these injustices as cultural or corporate failure, cultural weight bias means that we turn our sights on the fat person and say they have morally failed, deserve judgment and need to change.

I recognize the positioning of the fat person as one who has failed as included in what Garland-Thompson calls an "ideology of cure "(14). Again, Garland-Thompson is referencing people with disabilities not fat people, however, she notes that an "ideology of cure" disregards the diversity of individual bodily variation and instead "focuses on changing bodies imagined as abnormal and dysfunctional rather than on changing the exclusionary attitudinal, environmental, and economic barriers" that othered body types face (Garland-Thompson 14). Garland-Thompson believes that this focus on a cure "reduces the cultural tolerance for human variation," and allows for the aggressive cultural dismissal of those who live in bodies that are understood as outside the norm (14).

Consider the example of the airplane seat. Sitting next to a fat person on an airplane is a particularly contemptuous space for people and yet rarely do passengers

realize that their distaste for the fat passenger is a result of bias. In her *Fattitude* interview Saguy explains:

> The airplane seat comes up a lot in discussions of weight and civil rights. And, many people in my circles have said to me, "Okay. But come on, I … I don't want to be sitting next to somebody who won't be contained in their own seat. It's not fair to me. And they shouldn't…" What? They shouldn't what? They shouldn't be living in these bodies or … what? [the conversation] doesn't usually go to, how dare the airplane companies not provide these people with an extra seat so that they can be comfortable and I can be comfortable? …The questions that aren't asked and the conversations that aren't had are just as interesting as those that are had …there isn't a big rebellion against the airlines, and yet there could be, right? People could be saying and standing in solidarity with people of all sizes and saying, "You know, it's not fair to them. It's not fair to, to me." …The burden is on the airplane or the airliner to accommodate the actual bodies that are, are flying.

When people/passengers direct their anger at a fat person/passenger, they are flaunting western culture's systemic belief that living in a fat body is a choice and furthermore, a bad choice so the negative judgment that the fat person receives is systemically justified as a sound response. Saguy notes that "It's interesting to think of other types of bodies that are accommodated and are seen as being justified in seeking accommodation" (Fattitude). As an example of acceptable accommodations, Saguy brings up their airline allowing her to have her infant daughter on her lap, "that was seen as a legitimate request,

right? It was my choice to have a baby, I didn't, you know, have to, I chose to. I … took up more space with my child… you know with.... all of our gear etc., and yet that was seen as … deserving of accommodation" (Fattitude). Bringing up the notion of choice, Saguy is again clarifying the reality that as a culture we have branded fatness as a morally unsound state of being, whereas pregnancy and childrearing– which, by the way, come with a slew of health risks – are recognized as sound moral choices so therefore, unlike a fat passenger, a young mother is granted civil and just accommodation. Regularly, not only with regards to plane seats, but also all other spaces where fatness is frowned on, what should be understood as violations of civil rights are instead understood as and function for fat people as spaces of shame. Phul argues that a "lack of legislation prohibiting weight discrimination…sends a message to society that [weight bias] is tolerable" (Fattitude).

Fattitude and many others posit that in order to shift the systemic framework of fat oppression, we must stop representing fat people as unequal. But akin to representing health, representing equality is complicated. Representing justice when justice doesn't exist can be an overwhelming and unruly task. What does equality look like? How can we create images and characters that speak equality when viewers don't exactly realize that there is a need for equality? Right now, for fat people equality looks like activism. In other words, equality is found in the many voices and images that fat rights activists are posting in their social media. Equality is seen in the voices that push back against unjust representation, mostly, because just representation is few and far between.

There are a multitude of voices doing this work but the voice that is resonating loudest as the voice for fat civil rights is someone I have already mentioned, activist

Virgie Tovar. Grounded in a solid academic background, Tovar is not seeking acceptance into a kyarical framework; she is looking to burn it down. In the opening to her book *Hot and Heavy: Fierce Fat Girls on Life Love and Fashion,* she positions herself and the fat perspective as revolutionary in a world obsessed with "anti-pleasure" (1). She writes, "I was born into a world where fat women are outlaws: a band of lawless revolutionaries, fighting against myopic standards of beauty and archaic forms of femininity" (Tovar 1). In other words, Tovar envisions the fat body itself as symbolic – as representational of defiance and an intentional failure to assimilate to an oppressive culture.

Tovar floods her social media feeds with self-made memes and images that spread progressive ideas regarding fat civil rights. Most of these images feature her face and her 200+ pound brown body, smiling, laughing, eating, posing with a visible belly line or a wearing a bikini, giving the finger or some other clear act in defiance of that which is acceptable for fat people. These images also feature quotes that resonate the fight for fat civil rights outside of acceptance into a health standard or the beauty ideal, such as, "Riot Don't Diet," "Imagine a world where women and girls could have bigger aspirations than beauty," "I'm a Fat Anti-Assimilationist and No, Not Sorry," "I have the freedom to own a company, terminate a pregnancy, remain fabulously single and yet my freedom to be fat is heavily contested by my government, my community and my television set," or "Newsflash: I don't care if you're not attracted to me. Being pretty for you isn't my full-time job." Tovar also maintains a very active hashtag - #losehatenotweight. The through line in all that she does is about resistance not acceptance to the current kyriarcal framework.

Tovar is not part of the mainstream media but the mainstream is paying attention to her and those like her because these activists are building huge social media followings and a huge audience is something that the mainstream media and corporations can capitalize on. Recognition as consumers is important because on some level it registers an othered group as seen and invisibility is an oppression unto itself. Garland-Thompson explains "entry into democratic capitalism produces a kind of instrumental form of equality: the freedom to be appropriated by the consumer culture. In democracy to reject this paradoxical liberty is one thing; not to be granted it is another" (24). Recognizing the power of body positive activists , like Tovar, *Lane Bryant* made an attempt at representing – or maybe more accurately coopting – the fat activist movement with an advertising campaign that featured the hashtag, #plusisequal in 2015.

The #plusisequal campaign website reads, "It's time to represent. 67% of US women are a size 14-34. But they're underrepresented on billboards, magazines, TV…everywhere. We believe all women should be seen and celebrated equally…Add your voice and join us in calling for equal representation" (plusisequal.com) Good, right? Data on underrepresentation, check. Calling for change, check. Involving fat people, check. This was pretty amazing stuff. On the surface *Lane Bryant* clothier is one of the largest plus size retailers in the United States, so that means that the consideration of the fat body, a.k.a. the plus-size body, as equal hits the mainstream marketplace. In other words, there is a shift happening – fat people are being recognized as wanting to be seen and understood as consumers. Lane Bryant also asked people to share their own image using the hashtag, enabling individuals to render themselves seen.

Unfortunately, the #plusisequal campaign was a mess, a completely hollow sentiment. Mimicking a history of activism, *Lane Bryant* staged a rally in Times Square to celebrate the launch of the #plusisequal campaign. At the rally there were #plusisequal t-shirts, only they weren't available in plus sizes and the event was also fat hating, as the MC and other people given access to the microphone spread the messaging that weight loss was to be celebrated. Tovar, who attended the event called it "fat phobic" and scolded *Layne Bryant* for an attempt to capitalize on the language of a politic that they do not in fact support" (Ravishly.com). Obviously, like others, like myself, Tovar was drawn to the campaign because it had promise, because for a moment it felt like the mainstream might be starting to get it, and even though they didn't get it – they opened the door for Tovar to explain why and share her article using their hashtag and say:

> What is important to remember is that at the core of #PlusIsEqual are the roots of a political movement that was developed to grant women autonomy over our bodies and our lives, to free us from the sinister mechanisms of diet culture and food policing, and to demand humanity and actual equality. (Ravisly.com)

In other words, while the *Lane Bryant* rally was an abomination, there is something to the sentiment of the hashtag, a tiny glint of the inequality that fat people suffer twirling through the mainstream media. Perhaps it flares and goes out, perhaps it sells clothes, or perhaps it awakens someone to the fat rights movement. All is possible.

Unfortunately, the mistakes of #plusisequal campaign were not *Lane Bryant's* only snafu when trying to incorporate the ideas of the fat activist and body positive movements into their marketing. In response to a highly contested *Victoria's Secret*

marketing campaign that featured a line up of predominantly white very thin busty female models in bras and panties with the words "The Perfect Body" printed over them, *Lane Bryant* launched the #Imnoangel ad campaign. The word angel is in reference to Victoria's Secret's models, who are called the angels. *Lane Bryant's* #Imnoangel campaign featured a body positive ad – which relied on traditionally shaped plus size models, including Ashley Graham.

Much like the #plusisequal campaign, the #imnoangel campaign seemed to have decent intentions but in the end the execution of the idea lacked a genuine understanding of what equality looks like. The images with the #imnoangel campaign were fairly similar to "The Perfect Body" image that *Victoria's Secret* released because they featured minimal diversity in terms of body type and shape. There are two differences between the two. First, the #imnoangel campaign successfully included women of radically different skin tones – black, brown, white. And second, the models in the #imnoangel campaign were larger versions of the models in "The Perfect Body" campaign, but everyone of them still had bountiful breasts, hourglass shapes, and flat tummies.

Like Tovar's response to the #plusisequal campaign, *Fattitude* interviewee Jes Baker took to the internet to let *Lane Bryant* know that she didn't see their marketing as emblematic of true bodily equality. In an open letter to *Lane Bryant*, Jes Baker wrote:

> I question how empowering these images can be for "all women." #ImNoAngel only shows ONE shape while redefining the sexy plus women; that shape being the traditional hourglass: a body with a waistline considerably smaller than a larger bust and hips. This is almost always (and is, in this case) accompanied by a flat belly. This shape is ubiquitous in plus-size modeling and some say that only

> showing one type of body isn't an issue …but I disagree… Of course you can't represent *every type of body* when you have six models …but what Lane Bryant can do... is a little bit better. You've presented the "ideal" plus body: hourglass, perceivably "healthy", cellulite free, able bodied, cis-gender, and "conventionally" beautiful. …I'm going to ask you to consider including some of the following next time: cellulite; 90% of women have it. Bellies; many plus women don't have flat torsos. All abilities; we're all inherently sexy. Transgender women; they're "all woman" too. Small boobs and wide waists; we're not all "proportional." Stretch marks and wrinkles; they're trophies of a life lived.

In addition to writing this open letter calling out the company for their lack of bodily inclusivity, Baker created a counter campaign called #empowerallbodies. #Empowerallbodies was still images of women in there skivvies, however in addition to varying races, Baker included plus size women of true bodily variation: a trans woman, a woman in a wheel chair, women with small boobs, women with big round bellies and women with rolls and back fat.

Beyond activism and ad campaigns, fat civil rights representation in fictional tales is very limited. It is my contention that seeing fat equality on screen would mean being represented as normal. In other words, rather than telling stories about miserable or funny fat sidekicks, it would be nice to see a story about a fat person living his or her life – not razor focused on struggling with their weight – instead struggling with their life, love, job, family etc. As far as I know there is only one television show in existence that even comes close, *My Mad Fat Teen Diary,* a show that aired on the British network, E4.

It's worth mentioning that this particular show isn't yet available in the US but through the magic of the internet, a simple google search will give you access to some of the episodes. Based on the real diary of Rachel Earl from the late 1980s, the show revolves around Rae (Sharon Rooney), who has just been released from a psychiatric hospital because she is dealing with metal health issues, which include self-mutilation, anxiety, and binge eating disorder. Concurrent with her fight to be mentally healthy, Rae is a teenager, interested in hanging out with friends, passionate about music, obsessed with having a sex life, cocky, moody, sensitive, and brash. In a review for *The Guardian*, critic Davind Renshaw calls *My Mad Fat Teen Diary* "realistically fallible," noting that it "refuses to let its characters be shamed or embarrassed by the things they fear."

Honestly, Rae is a hot mess and because of that watching her is refreshing. In part because the choices she's making feel honest, but mostly because it is a pleasure to watch a young, delightfully messy, funny, smart protagonist who is fat and her fat is not being represented as all there is to know about Rae. There is nothing stereotypical about Rae's fatness. In a review for *BuzzFeed* writer Karen Onojaife explains:

> The success of the show lies in the fact that many of the familiar television tropes are absent or subverted. The main subversion is the fact that Rae isn't relegated to being a sidekick, only good for comic relief. She's a fat girl who is allowed to express sexual desire, and be the object of such desire, without being made to be the butt of any joke or something to be fetishized.

Like most media, *My Mad Fat Teen Diary* has small moments that are problematic, like the stereotypical idea that fat girls love junk food and that's how they got fat, but as a fat

woman, my past self – a high school-aged fat girl - quickly overlooks any negative bits in favor of the fantastic fat heroine that I was dying to see then, and am still hankering for now. As I remember it, there were no fat teen girl leads on television when I was growing up, which meant fatness was something one was just not allowed to accept about themselves if they wanted to be the star of their own lives. This show, this character, changes that.

Right out of the gate viewers are asked to recognize that Rae is valuable, despite her own battles with self-worth and the learned assumptions culture relays about fat people. In the first episode, Rae fantasizes that she is having a conversation with a younger version of herself who takes no issue with her body. Child Rae tells seventeen-year-old Rae that she doesn't care if she gets fat because people will love her anyways. Seventeen-year-old Rae asks: "Why would they like you?" Child Rae responds, "Because I'm brilliant," and promptly struts off chomping away at a pastry. Seventeen-year-old Rae is not a flailing outcast. She had friends, a mother who loves her, and a love interest who is clearly attracted to her. Despite all this, Young Rae radiates the confidence that seventeen-year-old Rae fights to reclaim because young Rae is not yet broken by the cultures perception of fatness. Even if Rae initially struggles to see her worthiness, the social success in Rae's life relays to the audience that Rae is brilliant and that one can be fat and still be awesome and loved. The message is also relayed that in order to be happy in a fat body and feel confidence, you need to shuck off what the world has taught you about your body.

This show is transformational not because it's perfect but rather because it feels real. Rooney's portrayal of Rae gives fat women everywhere a realistic fat girl who is

struggling to be happy and fat in a world that bullies fat people. Rae feels normal, nuanced and complicated and still fat. The normalization of a fat character allows a fat viewer access to "the privilege of normalcy (Garland-Thompson 4).

In short, I'm telling you to realize that representations of empowerment – of all kinds – aren't necessarily always perfectly free of the oppressions that dominate Western culture. Sometimes representations of empowerment are as simple as images of people who fight to accept themselves even though the culture tells them that what they are isn't normal or acceptable, like mad fat teen Rae.

In a world where much of the media oppresses a group, even tiny glimpses, tiny specks of representation that hint at the possibility that something un-oppressive exists remain important. In order for the media we see to truly change we need mainstream glimpses – transformational moments – no matter how buried or small – that begin the process. We need fat people to awaken to even the tiniest kernel of the idea that the way the world represents and treats them isn't fair. Flawed transformations are a start.

Ultimately, changing or reframing how fat is culturally understood means re-framing a lot of cultural messaging because fat-hatred is all wrapped up, tied up, and mixed up with many other forms of prejudice and oppression. In light of this, I believe that the end of fat hatred and oppression requires a cultural reimagining. In other words, for fat people to gain cultural respect we must also see a shift in the perceptions and treatment of people who are oppressed based on race, gender, economic status and/or heath status, as these states of oppressed existence often exist concomitantly with fatness. It is my belief that these concomitant states of being complicate the journey towards fat empowerment so that sometimes even when cultural momentum appears to be moving fat

acceptance forward, it can be completely failing with regard to alleviating other aspects of intersectional oppressions. With regard to this, many of the examples that I presented here are not clear cut or perfect, and sometimes they might not feel positive to you at all. They aren't always radical, or aware of intersectionality – and this is an issue. A huge issue, and yet –I think that with the critical awareness and conversational sphere that the internet and social media bring to the table– these partially aware solutions are transformational.

During the course of making *Fattitude* and talking to fat activists, I realized that despite their flaws these solutions are more empowering than they feel when picked apart via a focus on their demeaning attributes. As previously mentioned this is part of *Fattitude's* goal – to bring awareness to how that media portrays fatness and inspire the motivation to shift from negative renderings of fatness and fat people to more positive or rather more normative or more transformative representations. In an ideal world, people would watch *Fattitude*, recognize injustice and go out in to their lives enlightened and ready to implement flawless empowering change. However, in practice – the journey towards change is more messy and troublesome – a series of valleys and peaks rather than a linear trek from A to B or oppressed to un-oppressed

This year Mattel created a curvy Barbie. Is that perfect, nope, but it's something. Curvy Barbie is understood as beautiful, and healthy and worthy of respect. And perhaps, the little girl who plays with the curvy Barbie will be one step closer to realizing that fat people are worthy and if she's fat, then she's still worthy. That's why shifting representations is so important because once we recognize that fat people are PEOPLE –

normal people, deserving of respect and self-worth than questions of civil rights could be the byproduct of a shifted consciousness.

Conclusion: Fattitude's Solutions through Praxis:
Media Creation and Little Daily Acts of Activism in a Very Mobile World

Many activists are creating media that calls attention to the complicated nature of fat oppression. *Fattitude* is a contribution to the educational media that informs others about the complex reality of living in a fat body in a world that represents fatness as negative and worthless. This chapter takes up the praxis of getting *Fattitude's* ideas out into the world. The film is one I created with my business partner Viridiana Lieberman. In that process, there emerged an internet community that continues to grow. In this final chapter, I will detail how *Fattitude's* branding choices reflect intersectional feminist roots, explain *Fattitude's* online community, and outline some of the ways we intend to continue raising awareness by attaining distribution, touring with the film and maybe someday building a public education campaign. I will also reflect on how the journey of making *Fattitude* shaped my development as a thinker and activist.

Fattitude: More than a Movie

In the internet-bound, social media-age inspiring political activism and consciousness raising via documentary film is a multi-faceted action. It requires not only a film, but also an active internet and community presence. Early on – when *Fattitude* was just a little baby of an idea and Lieberman and I turned to the internet to raise funds, we had no idea how *Fattitude's* trailer would spread. *Fattitude* went from a little homespun project to a film that was discussed in all kinds of news media years before its release. And it all happened very quickly.

After we released a 5-minute trailer on the internet crowdfunding resource, Kickstarter, *Fattitude* was inundated with emails and people who wanted to help, participate or connect. So, using social media we began to create a *Fattitude* community and build an activist platform. *Fattitude* has: a website, fattitudethemovie.com; a Facebook page, www.facebook.com/fattitudethemovie; a Twitter, @fattitudemovie; a blog, fattitudethemovie.wordpress.com; and an Instagram account, @fattitudethemovie. *Fattitude* has more than 43,000 followers and makes an average of five posts a day to our Facebook page and Twitter account. I like to think that we are a hub for fat activist ideas. We post action items – such as petitions or calls for papers. We also post articles of plus-size fashion, fat acceptance manifestos and spotlights on activists. We think of ourselves as a well-curated go-to spot for all things fat acceptance. *Fattitude's* community grows at an average of 500 followers a week.

Fattitude makes a very conscious attempt to educate a mass audience about the issues of fat phobia and fat hatred. We hope to position ourselves as the space that people come to find solutions for fat phobia that are more than merely, "I want to be understood as a beauty consumer." In light of this, *Fattitude* tries to bridge this gap. Our posts include some of the beauty and fashion needs that beauty-oriented fat acceptance people are looking for, but in addition we include many posts about fat civil rights and maintain a strict adherence to the idea that dieting is not the healthiest solution. In other words, *Fattitude's* goal is to come to people where they are at – meaning if you are a *Fattitude* fan and you don't quite get the radical notion of overthrowing the current social systems that oppress fat people – well, then *Fattitude* still has something to offer you. We provide

access at all levels – in an attempt to push our fans to keep learning, keep questioning and keep searching for their own sense of fat freedom.

Fattitude's logo is in line with the decision to occupy the middle ground when it comes to fat acceptance, while still embracing an intersectional perspective. The graphic designer who drew the logo is Franchesca Gomez, a Florida-based artist, who earned her degree from the Ringling College of Art and Design. The logo was *Fattitude's* first attempt at creating a representation that was fat-positive and in line with social justice activism. As you can see, the *Fattitude* logo is an image of a fat woman who is neither white nor brown skinned (something in the middle), red hair, and she is wearing a green bikini/fatkini and holding a stenciled picket sign that says *Fattitude*. Her expression is not the traditional expression of the objectified female – meaning she doesn't gaze longingly at the viewer. Rather, she looks intense and focused. She stands facing away from the viewer looking back over her shoulder as if she were busy and the viewer's question has interrupted her task. She is not smiling or pouting. She is thinking, questioningly raising an eyebrow as if to say, "Really, that's your perspective? Well, let me tell you how I feel about that."

Fattitude's Logo

It is also worth noting that the choice of the bikini/fatkini is a conscious choice. While the partially nude woman means many things to the feminist conversation, to the fat acceptance conversation partial nudity – particularly the swimsuit/bikini – is not about

beauty or sexuality – as I mentioned in the previous chapter. Fat women (and men) are told that their bodies are so unsightly that they shouldn't be seen in a swimsuit, and bikinis or fatkinis are totally off limits because then the rolls of your fat may become visible, and allowing fat rolls to see the sun would horrify and burden those around you. In *Fattitude*, Lindy West explained how painful exclusion from the world of swimming was:

> I remember feeling like the worst, the worst possible thing that could happen to me would be for someone to see this part of my bo-…[points to her belly and then demarcates space from diaphragm to pubis bone]. This section from here to here which is just regular human skin. (Chuckle.) It's not a big deal, but you- ... I mean you're raised to think that it is like an obscene abomination and you are disgusting and you must hide. I mean, I didn't even go swimming for a decade probably and swimming is the best. It is so stupid to not go swimming. (chuckle) ... I think that the, uh, exclusion of fat women from swimming is possibly the number one oppression of fat people. I don't really think that, but oh my God, swimming is ... Swimming is really important. Swimming is the best.

As West explains, being convinced you are so unsightly that you shouldn't be allowed to participate in an everyday luxury like a dip in a swimming pool is a question of body injustice and shame. In this context the fat woman in the bikini becomes a radical figure -- one who throws off the residues of body shaming and embraces self-acceptance. So, by using a racially non-descript or at the very least ethnically non-descript fat woman in a bikini as our logo we brand *Fattitude* as embracing both beauty-based and revolutionary

solutions for fat bodies, ones that challenge hegemonic definitions of beauty, size, and much more.

The final element of the *Fattitude* logo that speaks to the ultimate goal – a shift in fat civil rights – is the picket sign. To be honest, this took time to conceptualize. How do you tell a viewer that your product is about change and activism without saying activism and change. The picket sign seems to symbolically harken to dissatisfaction with the current social system because when else does one carry a picket sign. In addition to the sign – *Fattitude's* tag line is "Every BODY deserves respect," underscoring that *Fattitude* is making a conscious choice to stand for equality among bodies, and particularly for fat people.

Future for Fattitude

In the beginning, Fattitude was a little project – a passion project, but, through the power of social media, it has grown and now has the potential to become a world-wide phenomenon. In 2015 clips of *Fattitude* were featured at the National Binge Eating Disorder Association Conference. With permission, *Fattitude's* trailer was used to discuss body acceptance in Germany, Israel and South Korea. We have also shown clips at the University of Missouri and at local events for eating disorder treatment facilities.

The film is finished, but its journey has only just begun. My guess is that if a Hollywood director or producer were to read this, they would find *Fattitude's* production process unusual. It was an organic journey. There were a lot of times when Viridiana and I were just winging it. On December 14th 2016 using an online application, I submitted *Fattitude* to a number of upcoming film festivals and, ultimately, *Fattitude* was accepted

to DOXA – the Vancouver Documentry Film Festival. The film had its world premiere on May 9th, 2017 at the Annex theater in Vancouver, Canada.

In total *Fattitude* will submit to approximately thirty festivals nationwide and if all goes as planned Lieberman and I will tour with the film to discuss the film's ideas and pursue distribution for the film. Above and beyond festival submission and *Fattitude's* world premiere, I look forward to soliciting universities and non-profits regarding showings of *Fattitude* and speaking opportunities. In this line of thinking, we also hope that others will use *Fattitude* as a teaching tool or a conversation starter when it comes to discussing fat acceptance, so eventually we hope to partner with educators and eating-disorder specialists to develop educational resources to coincide with viewings of our film, such as age-appropriate lesson plans or audience specific discussion questions.

Fattitude has already exceeded my expectations. My dream was to see *Fattitude* help bring the conversation about fat acceptance more into the open and the film has begun to accomplish that even before widespread release. Ultimately, I envision *Fattitude* as a resource. Fattitude is a media artifact that brings together some of the most powerful voices in the fat activist movement and enables viewers to quickly connect with the complexity of fat oppression. Already Lieberman and I have received emails from independent mental health professionals who feel that *Fattitude* will be helpful to them when treating patients with eating disorders or body image issues and the South Florida Association of Eating Disorder Professionals is sponsoring a showing of *Fattitude* at FAU in the Fall of 2017. We have also been contacted by college professors and/or organizations at Texas Women's University, UCLA, Oregon State University, Oakes College, and Mcalester College who are looking to show the film to students.

Fattitude, Fat Activism and Beyond

When Lieberman and I decided to make this film, it felt like there was little to no media being created that looked to empower fat bodies or disrupt the existing negative assumptions about fat bodies. But this is changing. During the filmmaking process there were a number of media moments when Lieberman and I were called upon by the mainstream press to discuss our reaction to a media moment that addressed weight stigma. For example, we were interviewed for a discussion about the Emmy-winning *Louis CK* episode, entitled "So Did the Fat Lady," which featured a 7-minute monologue where a fat woman (Sarah Baker) engaged with assumptions that people make about fatness and dating. There is also the fat character on the hit television show, “This is Us,” who is arguably problematic, but the actress who plays her, Chrissy Metz has reached out to *Fattitude* and openly discussed questions of fat empowerment in mainstream media interviews. So, it is clear that our activism already is being heard.

And yet, the journey has only just begun.

About a year and a half ago, I went to meet with a mental health organization about the work that *Fattitude* was doing. This organization had a monthly “Lunch and Learn” for their staff and they asked me to show some working clips of *Fattitude* and facilitate a Q&A. One of the clips I brought was a bit about plus-size designer Gabby Gregg and her fatkini. At the time my internet news feed was overrun with fatkini images. Fatkinis were trending on Twitter. *MTV* did a story on the fatkini; *The Today Show* did a story on the fatkini; *ABC News*, *The Huffington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, *Glamour Magazine* each had a story centered on the fatkini, and I was standing in a room of

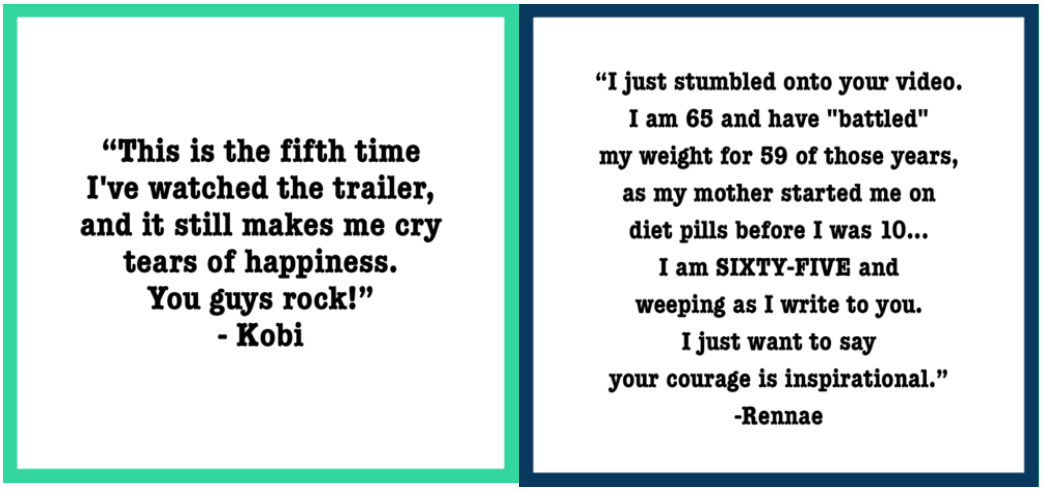
therapists whose lives were focused were on treating people with body image issues and eating disorders, and they'd never heard of the fatkini.

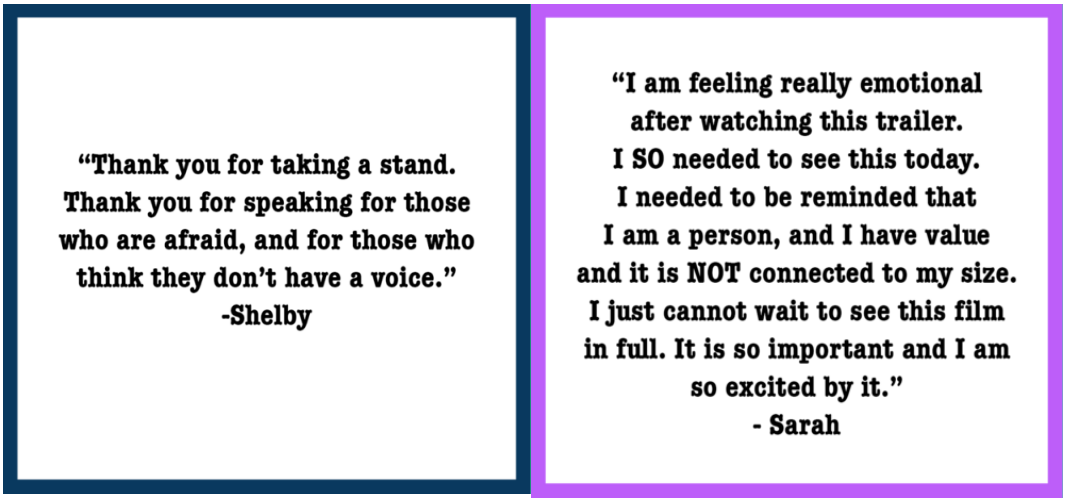
It's funny, in the internet advertising era, and the era of computer-based activism, I have found that my social media feeds can tilt the world in my direction. In other words, the algorithms that know what I'm interested in pointedly fill my world with every body-positive article or idea that people publish. Thus, it can seem like the whole world is starting to get weight stigma. And then, I close my computer, leave my house and remember that while change is happening, most people remain oblivious to the existence of the fat activist movement. Most people continue to spend their days fixated on the number of calories they've consumed or a few extra pounds that have nothing to do with their health. Even when people know what I do and that I am the co-creator of this fat acceptance film, they still tell me about the weight they've lost or gained or the great new diet because fat stigma and diet culture are so tightly woven into our conversational exchanges that they can't help it. Fat-hatred remains a default in everyday small talk.

Years ago, when I first came to feminism I remember feeling like the whole world was rife with chauvinistic comments, jokes and representations (mostly because it is). Today, I feel that way about fatness. What I am trying to say is that on a personal level, making *Fattitude* has absolutely changed me. Spending time talking to and learning from all of *Fattitude's* interviewees was absolutely akin to taking an intensive graduate level crash course in fat acceptance, but I think it also served as the roots for very personal awakening, the overturning of deep levels of internalized fat stigma that I didn't even know I was carrying.

The girl that grew up riddled with fat shame is gone. Who I am now is a woman who recognizes that my body weight says little to nothing about me. I am a person who values my health – both mentally and physically, someone who eats with both joy and nutrients in mind, someone who moves to feel empowered and with heart-health not thinness as my motivation. I am going to stop you if you tell me about your weight-loss or diet. I am going to scold you if you comment on another's weight gain. I'm going to take every opportunity to talk to anyone who will listen about shifting the fat prejudice that exists in western culture and mass-media because too many people are suffering from the burdens of systemic fat oppression. I am doing the work of *Fattitude* every day.

Part of my job as *Fattitude's* co-creator is reading our e-mail. In the last few years we have received a lot of angry hate mail from people who feel that fat stigma and oppression are justified. However, we have also received what I call love letters, people who have been so affected either by our trailer or our activist work that they have been compelled to write us. On fattitudethemovie.com we've created memes of quotes from these love letters because we think that even though we often discuss the hatred fat people encounter, the love fostered by relieving oppressions is a much more powerful tool. Here are a few of the memes we've created from our love letters:





Love Letters to Fattitude

This is the work of fat-activism and in turn the work of *Fattitude* – relieving the oppressions of people who have suffered their whole lives from the belief that they don't deserve respect because their bodies are too large. *Fattitude* gets love letters all the time and honestly, these letters make it all the hard work and vitriol worth-while. Each love letter reinforces my personal activist goals and *Fattitude's* intention to provide people with the material to realize that every BODY deserves respect both in life and on screen.

Notes

1. In Fat! So?: Because you Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size, Marilyn Wann explains that words like chubby, "heavy, large, volumptuous, zaftig, big-boned," are euphemisms and "you only need a euphemisms if you find the truth distasteful" (20). In other words – fat is the correct term to use when referring to a fat person because fat is the reality of fat body and concealing or trying to soften the word we use to describe that body underscores the idea that the fat body is wrong in some way.

2. This statement relies on understanding media representations as symbolic of the culture that produces them. This kind of analytical analysis of media representations and other cultural artifacts is thoroughly defined in Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin's book *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality At The Movies*, which explains that "every cultural artifact – book, movie, music video, song, billboard, joke, slang term, earring etc. – is an expression of the culture that produces it. Every cultural artifact is thus a text that conveys information, carrying the ideological messages of both its authors and the culture that produced it" (14).

3. This is a reference to Charlotte Cooper's idea of the headless fatty – a term for the way the media uses faceless fat people to complement stories about the obesity epidemic or other heath concerns that are correlated with fatness.

4. In the era of Marxist, Feminist, Postmodern and Queer theory, with a particular nod to Foucault, it must be acknowledged that 'natural' and 'unnatural' are loaded words, which beg the question who or what determines what is natural? Is natural an innate state of being or rather is natural a construction of the social sphere?

5. Like natural, the presentation of a 'normal' or 'abnormal' way innately implies a determined social construct, boundary or othering.

6. While there have been studies that speak about fatness using the word contagious, they are merely speaking in metaphor, implying that people who are fat often have friends who are fat. This coincidence may be based on a plethora of mental and social factors – none of which are an actual contagion. Fatness is not a virus or a bacteria that can be passed from one person to another based on proximity.

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