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The Commodification of the Body Positive Movement on Instagram

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Abstract

Over the years, the body positive movement has continued to thrive, taking many different shapes and forms. The ultimate goal of the body positivity movement is to address unrealistic ideals about beauty, promote self-acceptance, and build self-esteem through improving one's self-image and learning to love oneself to the fullest. However, many Body Positive advocates argue that the movement has now come to encompass any individual that exists outside of beauty norms in any way regardless of size, leaving women above a size 14 out of the conversation. Body Positive advocates have criticized body positivity for not being inclusive of all identities as the movement has now come to represent conventionally attractive, thin white women who are being positive about their bodies. This essay explores how the Body Positive movement has become politicized and commoditized by corporations looking to profit off of the growing movement, ultimately changing the structure and goals of the movement. Instagram transitioned into an advertising platform in 2013, which resulted in the commodification of user activity in order for advertisers to better direct advertisements at specific audiences; the exploitation of independent social movements by brands, who in this case claim to be Body Positive by posting makeup-free social media photos, launching plus size clothing lines, and including plus sized models in advertising campaigns; and direct consumer advertising through content deals with Instagram influencers on the platform. This essay explores how, through the commodification process, the Body Positive narrative throughout the advocate profiles shifts to one that is more conducive to capitalist interests.

Keywords: Body-positivity, Fat activism, feminism, Commercialization, Social Media

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Introduction

Since 2012 there has been a heightened presence of the body positive movement on Instagram. Women who occupy non-normative bodies use the platform to post selfies to challenge dominant ideals of feminine beauty, including the demands to produce smooth skin, adhere to body size norms, and avoid bodily fluids. This has been accompanied by a barrage of media outlets advising their readers on the top body positive accounts they need in their life to boost their body confidence, and how to be body positive on Instagram for more self-love (*Irish Examiner*, 2016; Burke 2015; Vino, 2015; O'Reilly, 2016). News media circulated articles across social media platforms with stories heralding women who, through the use of selfies, open up about their experiences with eating disorders, shut body shamers down, challenge "bikini body" myths, and confront expectations directed at women's post-pregnancy bodies. However, as the popularity of the body positive movement and the influence of advocates grew, corporations began commoditizing the body positive advocates and using their influence to push products, capitalizing off of the movement. During the commodification process, the body positive advocates lose sight of their purpose and begin reproducing dominant capitalist ideologies, objectifying their own bodies, and accepting beauty modification practices.

Methodology

This essay was developed as part of my thesis research, which employed a mixed methods approach beginning with an ethnographic content analysis of the body positive movement on Instagram to provide a foundation for the analysis of the images. I first undertook a visual and textual analysis of body positive content in order to determine whether the subversive performances of femininity are repeating or rejecting dominant norms of femininity. To further assess their perceived impact interviews were conducted with female users of Instagram selfies to determine how the movement is being perceived and whether it is changing or reinforcing dominant views of non-normative bodies.

In order to complete the visual and textual analysis I viewed and analyzed a non-random convenience sample of all available images on Instagram pertaining to the movement between September 2015 and April 2016. I then employed a non-random critical case sample to systematically select images that would represent adequately the body-positive movement. Within each advocates' account I made sure not to set boundaries as to what images I collected, in order to collect a variety of images that covered all of the themes the advocates addressed. Fifty images were chosen in order to get a large sample that would adequately encompass all of the themes discussed. Ten accounts were chosen based on the amount of followers the users had, with fifty thousand or more being the focus number. Thus, the sample consisted of ten clusters consisting of five images per account. It was also imperative that the accounts were similar in the quantity and consistency of images, selecting only accounts that were active and avid posters, with a minimum of one post per week. The body positive accounts were found through hash tags collected from the accounts. When viewing the images I did not follow any predefined and rigid categories for defining what was

relevant, allowing my prior research and familiarity with the movement to guide my observations and analyses (Altheide, 1987). I gathered a non-random purposive sample of images based on the following: a) images that identified with the movement through body positive hash tags; b) images of non-normative bodies that challenge conventions of ideal beauty; c) images in which the individual addresses dominant capitalist ideals of femininity and promotes the reclaiming of embodiment; d) photos that challenge norms around body size and shape; f) Photos where advocates share experiences with eating disorders, and; g) photos containing menstruation. This method provided an opportunity to assess major trends and comparisons.

The Body Positive Movement

For the purpose of this study, the term "body positivity" will be defined as any message, visual or written, that challenges dominant ways of viewing the physical body in accordance with beauty ideals and encourages the reclaiming of embodiment and control over one's self-image. Body positivity encompasses any individual or movement actions which aim to denounce the societal influences and construction of body norms, and instead promotes self-love and acceptance of bodies of any shape, size, or appearance; including rolls, dimples, cellulite, acne, hairy bodies, bleeding bodies, fat bodies, thin bodies, and (dis) abled bodies.

In 2012 plus sized model and feminist, Tess Holliday, founded the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account which launched the campaign #effyourbeautystandards in response to messages across the media telling women that they are not beautiful if they are above a size 10. Tess Holliday's #effyourbeautystandards campaign was a call to all women to love their bodies and show the world that they can be sexy and fashionable too. To date, Tess Holliday is the most influential body positive advocate with over 1.3 million followers. In 2015 Holliday was signed to one of the leading model agencies in Europe, Milk Management, as their first model over a size 20, which landed her a cover on *People Magazine* in 2015. Holliday has been set on inclusion and representation of fat bodies within the fashion industry. Her personal account on Instagram showcases her edgy and chic sense of fashion. She has even collaborated with U.S brand Penningtons, launching her own clothing collection that is reflective of her style and offers edgier clothing for plus sized women.

Fig. 1 Challenging the representation of fat bodies within the fashion industry; Photograph by @tessholliday; 3 November 2015; Instagram, Inc.

Since then, the movement has expanded, particularly on Instagram. The most popular feature that is used to connect the movement on Instagram is the use of hashtags. Many of the accounts linked with the body positive movement incorporate multiple hash tags into their captions in order to identify the multiple issues their images are attempting to address. The hashtag #effyourbeautystandards continues to be the most widely used hashtag by the movement. A quick search of the #effyourbeautystandards hash tag on the platform brings up 1,557,522 posts that have been tagged. While the critique of beauty ideals seems to be the unifying material that is common amongst body positive accounts, hash tags have developed to address body size more specifically, with the most used hash tag being #plussize with 3,671,560 tagged posts by women who are proudly embracing their plus sized bodies and making them visible.

Other women within the movement address the standards of beauty that covet thin bodies and encourage women to diet in order to resemble these ideals as closely as possible. Many of these members share their experiences living and recovering from eating disorders that influenced by mass media messages telling them that being thin is beautiful. These images are identified through the hash tags #riotsnotdiets (30,494 posts) and #losehatenotweight (32,835 posts). Megan Jayne Crabbe from the account, @BodyPosiPanda, is one of the most prominent influencers in this category with 213,000 followers. Crabbe openly shares her experiences living with and recovering from anorexia in hopes that it will provide other women living with the same experience the

support they need. Through body-positive quotes and photos, Crabbe promotes self-love and inspires others to change their mental attitude towards themselves.

Many other body positive advocates are plus sized fashion bloggers, tagging their photos with the hash tags, #plussizefashion (1,095,266 posts) and #plussizeootd (53,489 posts), which stands for 'plus sized outfit of the day'. These members, like Tess Holliday, want to redefine fashion for plus sized bodies and challenge expectations of what fat women are allowed to wear, showing the world that they can be sexy and fashionable too. Furthermore, fitness and yoga inspiration accounts have emerged, as well, that document the yoga practices and fitness journeys of fat women. These women challenge assumptions that fat bodies are not strong and active bodies, and seek to provide an alternative representation of athletic bodies that are dominant throughout mass media. Body positivity is segmented even further into more specific hash tags that body positive community members use to identify additional issues that their photos address. Body positive members who challenge social norms around shaving and menstruation by posting images where body hair or menstrual blood and hygiene products are visible.

Recently, there has been a debate amongst the body positive community regarding the shape that the movement has taken in recent years. Body positivity has its roots in the fat liberation movement (also known as the fat acceptance movement) that began during second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and gained prominence in third-wave feminism, tackling issues of body politics and discrimination against fat bodies. Over the years, the body positive movement has continued to thrive, taking many different shapes and forms. The ultimate goal of the body positivity movement is to address unrealistic ideals about beauty, promote self-acceptance, and build self-esteem through improving one's self-image and learning to love oneself to the fullest. However, according to body positive advocates such as Marie Denee (Dalessandro, 2016), the movement has now come to encompass any individual that exists outside of beauty norms in any way regardless of size, leaving women above a size 14 out of the conversation. Body Positive community members have criticized body positivity for not being inclusive of all identities as the movement has now come to represent conventionally attractive, thin white women who are being positive about their bodies. Ariel Woodson from Instagram account @kiddotrue and co-producer of feminist, intersectional podcast Bad Fat Broads describes this new version of body positivity as "'defanged fat activism repackaged suitable only for corporate use and coddling the feelings of thin, able-bodied, cisgender, white women' or 'I'm positive I don't give a damn what you think about my body'" (Dalessandro, 2016). According to Denee, the body positive movement has become politicized and commoditized by corporations looking to profit off of the growing movement, ultimately changing the structure and goals of the movement.

As the popularity of the body positive movement and the influence of advocates grew, corporations began commoditizing the advocates identities and capitalizing off of the movement. While social media profiles function as a site of becoming for users as they create, maintain, and update their virtual presence on the newsfeed on a regular basis, corporations have become aware of this and are capitalizing off of the labour of users. Judith Butler argues that users form their virtual subjectivities on social networking sites, by constantly updating their statuses and profiles, in order to remain legible (Coté & Pybus, 2011). Individuals engage in this form of labour due to the

desire to count as a subject and thus become legible for recognition. However, while making themselves legible through their profiles, users make themselves legible to corporations who want to sell their products. Commercial interests hijack these spaces that are meant to be democratic. Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus (2011), define user-generated individuated archives as the "lucrative lifeblood of surplus value and exchange [...] for users, it is about the production and circulation of subjectivities; for Facebook, it is a political economic imperative" (23). Social networks are a reflection of capitalism's drive for profitability through the immaterial and affective labour of its users that drive the profitability of platforms. Popular culture offers a distraction from work, but in fact causes the worker to fall further into the trap of capitalism and consumerism. Adorno and Horkheimer (1986) claim that as the Culture industry encroaches upon the small distractions of leisure activity, amusement has become an extension of labor under late capitalism. The only freedom the culture industry has to really offer, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, is a freedom from thinking.

Instagram as an Advertising Platform

The commodification of users on the platform followed Instagram's transition into an advertising platform in 2013. The information of user activity has become commodified and sold to advertisers in order for them to better direct advertisements at specific audiences. Marketers collect consumer data and track the brands and channels consumers prefer. Instagram revealed an hour-by-hour breakdown of when its users are on the platform and when consumers are engaging with content, allowing marketers to know the best times of day to share a message on the visual platform. Targeting criteria on Instagram allows advertisers to get their products or services in front of exactly the right people at the right time (Swant, 2015). Marketers can also quickly track how their campaigns are doing, learn from what is working and what is not, and even use the platform to launch new products. Corporations collect and centralize the data to track what brands and channels consumers prefer in order to push consumer-driven content and video tutorials dedicated to popular products across Web, social, email and in-store channels (Rae, 2015). Consumers are encouraged to post photos or selfies wearing or using the products, along with a corresponding hash tag identifying the brand of the product.

Moreover, marketers achieve direct consumer advertising through content deals with celebrities and Instagram influencers on the platform. Brands, particularly in fashion, spend more than one billion dollars per year on sponsored Instagram posts (Schaefer, 2015). Some brands pay Instagram influencers to post photos attending events while modeling their products, or send users free products to feature in upcoming photos or videos. The cost per photo (or sponsored content) depends on the influencers following, status, and the terms of the deal and can range anywhere from $5000 to $200,000 per post (Heine, 2015; Schaefer, 2015).

Marketing and talent agencies such as the Mobile Media Lab and Next, have launched in order to represent Instagram influencers and connect them with brands who advertise products on Instagram (Saiidi, 2014). Contracts are negotiated in which influencers agree to feature the brand in a certain number of posts without featuring any other competitors in the same shot or future

posts for an agreed upon time (Schaefer, 2015). Other tech companies, such as D'Marie, developed in order to provide brands with a tool for measuring the value of influencers. According to D'Marie CEO Frank Spadafora, their systems have a "proprietary algorithm that takes into account fifty-six factors to determine the marketing success of individual social media posts, including reach, engagement (likes, comments, shares, etc.), clicks and purchases" (Heine, 2015). The system will be able to predict brands sales conversions and find the best person, best social platform, and best message for the advertisers (Heine, 2015).

The Appropriation and Exploitation of the Body Positive Movement

Indeed, encroaching on the movement, some brands now claim to be body positive by posting makeup-free social media photos, launching plus size clothing lines, and including plus sized models in advertising campaigns. An example of a company that is prevalent on social media is American Eagle, which began incorporating body positive attitudes and approaches to their brand Aerie. Aerie promotes realistic standards for women, has banned airbrushing, and features body positive influencers in their shoots. Additional brands that have begun including plus sized models into their advertising campaigns and have launched plus sized clothing for larger women use plus sized models such as Ashley Graham, who is closer to the normative "ideal" body. Touching on this very limited representation of plus sized bodies, Marcy Cruz, blogger of Fearlessly Just Me and blog editor of Plus Model Magazine stated: "Body positivity to me means promoting body love to everyone and all bodies, not just ones that the media pushes, which seem to push the message that plus size means a size 14 and that's it" (Dalessandro, 2016). Body positive advocates are disgruntled by this change because it does not accurately represent a variety of larger sized women, not to mention that these companies often rely on Photoshop to remove cellulite, stretch marks, and other imperfections. The representation of plus sized women who are just outside of the beauty ideal once again ignore the experiences of larger bodies, rendering them invisible.

Furthermore, when looking at the accounts of the body positive movement the branding of influencers becomes apparent. Corporations and audiences who realized the potential of the body positive movement began capitalizing off of the growing popularity and the influence that the body positive movement has, paying advocates to promote and endorse products throughout their images. Users endorse products by either featuring posts where they are using the products, or post professional and staged images of the products. Public Relations firms contact influencers and tell them how to structure their profiles and create an identity in line with the brand. Images and captions are constructed in order to make advocates more relatable to their followers and create a connection to their brand. Influencers work hard maintaining an identity coherent with the brand, creating images that are perfected and fit the aesthetic of Instagram. What followers see in these artificial images is what companies want consumers to see, and is not the real lives of the influencers, but rather a branded identity. Furthermore, in images where they are not endorsing products, users are still performing as audience commodities by creating the content (i.e. preferences, tastes, likes) that is then packaged and sold to advertisers.

Through the commodification process, the body positive narrative throughout the advocate profiles shifts to one that is more conducive to capitalist interests. Initially the accounts analyzed for the study started off as personal accounts with images of the advocates daily routines, including images of family and friends. A narrative then gradually developed that discussed their experiences with eating disorders, fat shaming, mental illness, and their self-image; reclaiming control over their body, practicing self-love, and exploring their embodiment. The body positive advocates began with one hash tag and then increased their use of hash tags once their followers began to grow and other advocates began taking up the use of the same hash tags within their posts. As their success in self-presentation was reinforced through the increasing 'likes' that their posts received, increase in followers, and growing media attention from magazine and article features, the advocates profiles became a contrived perfection made to continue attracting attention. The advocates began using more hash tags and perfecting the body-positive narrative throughout their images. During this process the accounts attracted the attention of companies looking to profit off of their influence. As a result, the body positive narrative inherent throughout their images and captions shifts to one engrained in consumer capitalist activities in which they promote makeup, jewelry, teas, exercise equipment, and more.

This shift symbolizes the assertion made by Iqani and Schroeder (2015), in which they claim that selfies are commodities as a result of being enrolled in a corporate owned service, which is ultimately profit oriented and sells advertising space. Selfies are an expressive consumer practice, a branding tool aimed at promoting particular narratives of the self, a market research technique, and a social media content generator. Furthermore, self-portraits turn the image of the self into a commodity that is made public and consumable by others, "projecting personal images into collective space and literally 'sharing' very widely self-produced messages" (7). Selfies are a part of the capitalist spectacle, as Borgerson (2013) explains:

> Having cleverly evolved in order to deliver a feeling of empowerment, in that individuals are generating and sharing their own images of themselves, the spectacle has arguably completely taken over even self-presentation. Instead of genuine self-expression, of ideas, debates, arguments (presented in visual form), selfies arguably show how individual agency has been shaped by the power of consumerist mediation. (Iqani & Schroeder, p.7)

This complicates the assertion that selfies are an empowering tool for women. Applying the claims of Guy Debord in, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1995), authentic social life, or in this case the representation of feminist politics and social activism, has been replaced with representation: "All that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (12). When analyzing the body positive selfies, the decline of "being into having", and "having to appearing" (16) becomes apparent. Immersed within consumer capitalist culture, agency in self-presentation is limited as the construction of an individual's identity is mediated through our visually ingrained culture and the images that surround us. These images are produced by, and reinforce, consumer capitalist ideologies. Individuals construct and present identities that are viewed as inherently acceptable within their social groupings. Rather than representing the self authentically, individuals represent

what they want their followers to see. Selfies as spectacles can therefore be viewed as a “social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). The selfie comes to represent the self to others. Following Debord’s claim that "passive identification with the spectacle supplants genuine activity", relationships between commodities have replaced relationships between people. Human perception and authenticity has been affected by the spectacle of society, as individuals come to consume others through their fabricated representations of the self.

Personal Politics versus Capital Interests

During this process the content of the body positive accounts changes as the advocates focus more on consumption practices—in which case the body positive content virtually disappears, with only the occasional comment or hash tags. Users begin promoting clothing, lingerie, jewelry, teas, cleanses, and makeup brands. Some advocates begin wearing more makeup and attending to their style, posting tutorial videos for their followers to find out where and how to “get the perfect look”(see figs. 2 and 3). Body positive advocates, such as @anastasiaamour, used her influential position to write a book and promote it through her platform (see fig. 5). Other advocates, such as self-loving yogis for example, begin using their platform to initiate sponsored challenges and promote products including leggings, sports bras, and yoga equipment (see fig. 4). They begin frequenting and promoting live classes, their prices, and location through their profile (see figs. 6 and 7). They also began their own yoga tours around North America. Throughout this process their bodies are tamed through their branding and literal restricting of their freedom through clothing. Body positive yogis have begun wearing yoga pants and tops to endorse products, which works to physically hold in and conceal the female body that is out of control. This is also evident in the image of @mynameisjessamyn practicing yoga in a corset and heels (see fig. 8), which slims, conceals, restricts, and covers her fat body that requires controlling. As a result, a contradiction emerges as the body positive activists are brought back into the very capitalist system of consumer culture that they originally rejected.

Fig.2. Fashion Lookbook; Photograph by @chooselifewarrior; 5 July 2016; Instagram, Inc. (Editor Note: Check figure numbers as it gets confusing from here)

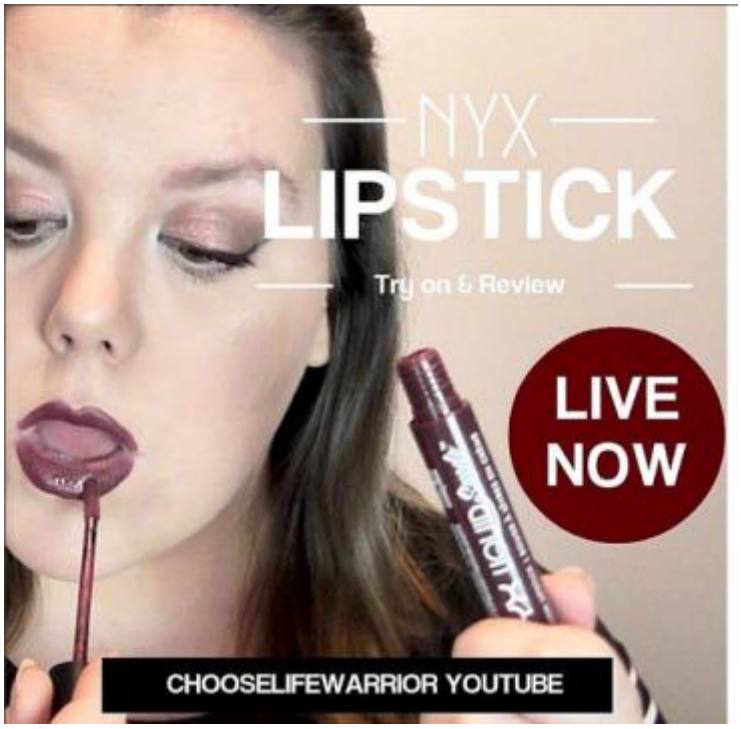

Fig.3. Lipstick sponsorship; Photograph by @chooselifewarrior; 15 August 2016; Instagram, Inc.

Fig.4. Fab Fit Fun promotion; Photograph by @biggalyoga; 18 April 2016; Instagram Inc.

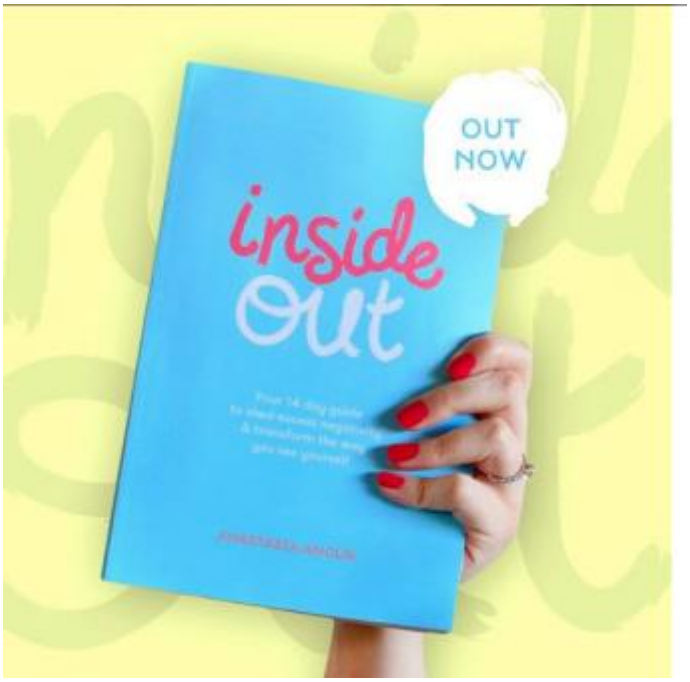

Fig.5. Personal Book Promotion; Photograph by @anastasiaamour;
13 November 2015; Instagram Inc.

Fig.6. Yoga Classes; Photograph by @biggalyoga; 13 June 2016; Instagram Inc.

Fig.7. EveryBody Yoga bundle sale; Photograph by @mynameisjessamyn;
3 February 2016; Instagram Inc.

Fig. 8. Practicing yoga in a garter, stockings, and high heels;
Photograph by @mynameisjessamyn; 7 December 2015; Instagram, Inc.

Furthermore, the advocates reproduce the dominant ideal of the "thin body" through their promotion of detox teas that assist with weight loss and claim to shed belly fat—a concept they originally contested in their move towards the acceptance of all body types (see figs. 9 and 10). While some advocates may argue through their posts that they are engaging in diet and exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle, they are still adhering to a fad constructed within mass media that equates healthy eating with the virtuous, promoting a new form of dieting that continues to control the female body. These diets, for whatever purpose, are used to control women's bodies and have power over women, as Naomi Wolf (1962) argued: "A culture fixated on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty, but an obsession about female obedience. Dieting is the most potent political sedative in women's history; a quietly mad population is a tractable one" (187). Therefore, while body positive advocates think they are escaping the demands placed on women's bodies to diet for the purpose of losing weight, they have instead become victim to an alternative dieting discourse that promotes diet and exercise in order to maintain a healthy and happy lifestyle. Through this process the advocates are brought back into the very industry they opposed and their bodies are regulated through the maintenance of these diets.

Fig.9. Sponsorship for Flat Tummy Tea; Photograph by @biggalyoga;
2 November 2015; Instagram, Inc.

Initially body positive advocates promoted the acceptance of any flaws on the skin or body, displaying their real bodies in all of their glory, and rejecting the ideal feminine beauty. However, the content analysis of the body positive movement revealed that as the advocates refined and developed their profiles they relied on the use of filters and photo editing when posting images. The advocates adhere to the aesthetic of Instagram, which promotes the "filtered, shadowed, sharpened, brightened, tilted, faded, structured, saturated way of seeing life through a lens" (Swant, 2015), that has changed the way people portray themselves, see others, and has impacted brands in the process (Swant, 2015). Through this process the advocates literally smooth over their skin and achieve the plastic Barbie ideal prevalent throughout mass media.

Fig.10. Flat Tummy Tea Sponsorship; Photograph by @mynameisjessamyn;
1 October 2015; Instagram, Inc.

Furthermore, the unattainable ideal constructed by the objectified female body within mass media is aided through photo editing tools such as Photoshop. The use of Photoshop in mainstream advertising has been addressed and opposed by the body positive advocates. However, it became apparent that as the advocates were featured in news media articles, or entered into the fashion industry as plus sized models, they allowed their bodies to be Photoshopped. For example, in the diversity photo shoot for the Dear Scantily campaign that @bodyposipanda participated in there was hardly a "diverse" representation of women (see fig. 11). First and foremost the shoot featured women of an average body size who closely resembled the ideal woman, rather than those bodies above a size sixteen. The larger women in the photo were placed in the background, with their bodies covered by those of the thinner, more "desirable" bodies. Furthermore, out of the seven women featured in the shoot, only one of those was a visible woman of colour, who was placed in the back row, just peeping out from behind the other six White women. Furthermore, while there was one woman who lives with a (dis)ability featured in the spread, she was photographed in a such a way that her (dis)ability was erased. Therefore, while the campaign claimed to represent a diverse representation of women, they actually provided a very limited variety of representations. Moreover, a topic of concern that @bodyposipanda draws attention to in a preceding photo is the campaign's reliance on Photoshop to smooth over the skin of the participants (see fig. 12):

> Because if you're gonna see the posed, polished, professional version, I'm sure as hell gonna make sure you see this one too. Embracing my belly rolls, celebrating my softness. I

> know the world wants me to value myself higher in one of these pictures, to worship what's 'flattering' and be ashamed of what's not. Well I refuse to feel that shame. I'm worthy of self love either way, and I choose to see the beauty in both. Same body, same underwear, same person underneath - that's the only part that really matters.

Rather than rejecting the use of Photoshop on her image to reduce the appearance of her cellulite and rolls, @bodyposipanda chose to participate in a practice that she claims to reject throughout the body positive narrative on her Instagram account. In her desire for media attention and increased social standing, @bodyposipanda allowed her body to become subjected to the very photo editing practices that she opposes, allowing her body to be misrepresented and her embodiment erased. Through acts such as these, advocates contribute to the misrepresentation of women and erasure of female embodiment that is ever so prevalent throughout Contemporary capitalist society—allowing the "beauty ideal" and the practices that enable it to continue to exist. While body positive advocates claimed to reject dominant codes of femininity, it became evident that they fell victim to the demand placed on women to achieve the appearance of smooth and flawless skin.

Fig.11. Dear Scantily Diversity Photo Shoot; Photography by @bodyposipanda;
7 July 2016; Instagram, Inc.

Furthermore, while feminists such as Dong-Hoo Lee (2005) argue that women have the potential to subvert the conventional patriarchal gaze by enacting various self-portraits and manipulating the camera to transform their body image, the analysis of the body positive movement found that the advocates are in fact reproducing rather than confronting the conventional structure of the gaze shaped by patriarchal capitalist society. Through the positioning

of their bodies and inviting gazes while posing to promote clothing, makeup, or accessories, the body positive advocates demonstrate the arguments of John Berger (1972) and Laura Mulvey (1975), who claim that the conventional structuring of the gaze in mass media has reproduced man as an 'ideal' spectator and woman as a viewed object and, consequently, makes women accustomed to looking at themselves through men's eyes and displaying themselves attractively in order to attain an ideal female body molded by capitalist society and reinforce the conventions of the gaze. When women participate in male culture they have no subjectivity and exist for men. Even when a woman knows what she is doing, she still participates in an act where she knows she is being used as an object. Through the up close images that segment different parts of their bodies, advocates explicitly objectify their own bodies. Moreover, the advocates manipulate their bodies to appear thinner and more desirable by twisting, turning and crossing their arms and legs in order to appear smaller and reflect dominant ways of positioning the female body that invites the male gaze.

Fig.12. Addressing the use of Photoshop; Photography by @bodyposipanda;
10 July 2016; Instagram, Inc.

Resembling the representation of women in advertising and pornography, the advocates are hypersexualized and pose in welcoming positions, staring directly at the viewer with a sexy and inviting stare that lures the viewer in. Through this process women remain submissive and passive objects that exist for the pleasure of male desire. For women viewing these images it reinforces the relegation of women to the realm of appearance, whose responsibility it is to appear as sexualized and physically attractive. A contradiction emerges in which the images that the body positive advocates produce explore what Tasker and Negra characterize as formulaic female sexualities, as the advocates "enthusiastically perform patriarchal stereotypes of sexual servility in the name of

empowerment" (2007, p. 3). The body positive advocates replicate patriarchal conventions in their quest to achieve desirability. In presenting a more eroticized and desirable image of the self, body positive activists fall back on traditional constructions of desirability.

This exercise of an individual's freedom to engage in commodity consumption has been connected with contemporary neoliberalism that emerged in the early 1980's as the hegemonic economic, political and social policy of the West (Gill, 2006a, 2007a). With the rise of post feminism and neoliberalism, Chen (2013) claims that a new image emerged of an empowered woman confidently embracing patriarchal heterosexuality and commodity culture. By means of this image, women have been duped into believing they are exercising individual 'choice', 'freedom' and 'agency', which often is measured in terms of commodity consumption. This new image of the neoliberal female subject has been viewed as both anti-feminist, and as an autonomous consuming subject. Whelehan (2000) offers the view of this new femininity as "being constructed in the neoliberal context that addresses young women as autonomous, confident and desiring sexual subjects who actively and knowingly make choices, in stark contrast to women's traditional image of passivity and subordination" (5), which Gill (2007b) has marked as a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification (Gill, 2007b; Gill and Scharff, 2011; Chen, 2013). While postfeminist popular culture is conducive to sexual expression, allowing women to express and discuss their sexuality and sexual orientation, Budgeon (2001) argue that freedom and agency has come to refer to "an individual's voluntary choice of self-objectification, and of willingly participating in and following whatever is prescribed by patriarchal heterosexual norms and capitalist commodity culture" (qtd. in Chen 2013). Thus the 'popularization' of feminism has alienated feminism and reinforced the patriarchal status quo (McRobbie, 2007, 2011). While women contend that they are exercising individual choice, are in control of their lives, and can make their own decisions and choices, they are ultimately utilizing the feminist ideal of female freedom to justify their non-feminist choices and silence disapproval from others.

However, the goal of the body positive movement is to take up space in an area that their bodies have never been represented before, and perhaps that is exactly what they are doing. While it can be argued that the advocates are 'selling out' by being brought into the culture industry and profiting off of this movement, perhaps it can instead be said that this was their intention in the first place—to be represented within mass media, a space where their bodies have previously been excluded. These women are now profiting off of the very capitalist system that previously excluded them, and ultimately, have control over whether or not they profit off of what they are doing or whether they agree to be sponsored. Advocates are experiencing power in the sense that they have gained entry into a marketplace where they have control over whether or not they sponsor and endorse brands. Women choose to endorse and sponsor brands because it is the most desirable and profitable option. Chen (2013) asserts that womens' possible exploitation by capitalist commodity culture where they are lured into full participation collapses as the boundary between the entrepreneur, conventionally coded as active, and the consumer, coded as passive, is erased as they are emphasized to be the producer of their own choices and calculators of their own risks; constituting a new type of subject. Challenging criticism of irrational consumption or manipulation by scheming capitalists, Chen (2013) asserts that women should not be seen as victims of

consumerism, but rather should view consumptions practices as building up individual identity, as having the competitive edge in marketized arenas, and contributing to the accumulated human capital of the economic subject who is their own entrepreneur, producer of satisfaction and pleasure, and bearer of her own responsibility.

Conclusion

Moreover, what does this mean for the revolutionary opportunities made possible by social media platforms, when it seems as though movements opposed to the social order cannot escape the hold of the Culture Industry? Once on the fringe, movements are brought back under the hold of the Culture Industry and exploited for financial gains, reestablishing their power over the masses. However, lacking fashionable or athletic clothing for plus sized bodies in the mainstream fashion industry, plus sized clothing companies have emerged that provide fat women with clothing necessary for everyday life, physical activity, and more. As a result, a consideration should be made regarding the degree to which these companies that make clothing and products for fat women are legitimate members of the body positive community.

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