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FAT AS A FEMINIST ISSUE: ACTIVISM AND AGENCY IN THE BODY POSITIVE MOVEMENT

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of London South Bank University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2021

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Activism and Agency in the Body Positive Movement

Abstract

This thesis examines the way hashtag networks impact the expression of contemporary activism and agency, focusing on the #BodyPositive movement (BPM). It investigates the new possibilities for fat identity formation introduced by the Instagram imaging platform.

My study historically contextualises the fat female body within Western culture to enable appreciation of the systemic discrimination and policing imposed within a patriarchal society. This retrospective applies an intersectional approach, with particular emphasis on the structural inequalities encountered by black women of colour (BWOC) along the axes of weight, gender and racial identity.

The research is based on responses from over five hundred online survey participants. The survey provided an opportunity to critically interrogate Instagrammers about their protest habits and any underlying feminist motivations. Participant observation fieldwork was also undertaken at three offline body positive events. These descriptive accounts advance current debates querying the political inclinations of those engaged in so-called 'slacktivism.'

Qualitative research is used to challenge traditional conceptualisations of activism and assert the integral role the body occupies in claims-making. A feminist lens is deployed to investigate how hashtaggers use Instagram's photographic processes to re-represent the fat female body for protest purposes. Analysis is further supported by the application of social movement theory (SMT) to determine whether social media activity can be classified as social movement activity.

Feminist debate is taken in a new direction through recognising the camera as a significant campaign instrument and not merely a source of objectification. Content creators are understood as agentic subjects reclaiming their fatness from conventionally derogative discourses.

Research found body exhibitionism can be experienced as empowering by fat women occupying femininities associated with stigma and shame. However, it makes an important contribution to feminist scholarship in highlighting the drawbacks to digital activism, such as algorithmic bias, which diminishes the visibility of already marginalised groups.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by expressing immense gratitude to both my supervisors, Dr. Shaminder Takhar and Prof. Caitriona Beaumont for their continued support and insight over the past three years. Your input has illuminated the way and you are girl power truly in action!

No protest study would of course be complete without protestors. I want to extend a big fat thank you to the hundreds of you that took the time to commit your lived experiences to academic record by participating in my online survey. Instagram may be all about the pictures, but I just knew BoPo Warriors had loads to say, and you certainly did not disappoint.

Diolch yn fawr iawn to all the members from Cardiff University's Feminist Society for kindly giving up an evening to take part in my pilot study. Together we are stronger, and my survey was much improved thanks to your invaluable input. Much appreciation also goes to Dinah Gibbons and Lisa Derrick for aiding the survey review process.

A big shout out to all those from library land, from one librarian to another, for their expertise throughout this academic adventure. The team at The Feminist Library particularly supported my research, especially after all bricks-and-mortar knowledge repositories suddenly had to close during lockdown. It was important to me when conducting a feminist protest study that my literature review expanded beyond the perimeters of a paywall, because put simply, this is where all the good stuff happens. When physical access proved impossible, The Feminist Library volunteers kept me connected with the beating heart and raised fist of their grassroots collections from afar. I am incredibly grateful for your precious help and assistance.

Likewise, further thanks to Carlie Pendleton, for facilitating access to holdings from the Bishopsgate Institute when a global pandemic closed the

gates. Your sharing was an act of kindness, plus your thesis is amazing!

Another thank you is extended across the pond to Richard and Abby from Seattle Public Library who were most helpful in providing me with a time machine back to the 1990s Riot Grrrl era. Graham at The University of Connecticut further aided my gleeful search through their fat liberation archives. A special mention also goes across the Bristol Channel to Ian from the University of Bristol's Special Collections for meeting with me to uncover the activist content in their holdings.

It was a pleasure to spend St. Andrew's Day 2021 at Glasgow Women's Library where I got a warm welcome on a very cold afternoon. The library staff were guiding lights through their glorious zine archive, as I perused and chortled between the rafters. A big thank you also goes to Daisy Payling and Trina Moseley. Although I have never had the pleasure of meeting you 'IRL,' you have both been supportive by sending me words of encouragement and recommendations during my study.

I additionally want to mention the wonderful, EJ Renold and the rest of the gang from Cardiff University's Gender and Sexualities Research Group for welcoming me into the fold to share my project over the past three years.

Without Cynthia Carter's undergraduate gender studies module, this feminist research into how body politics continue to be fought onscreen would never have got off the ground. Opening the door to Bute building and the books on her reading list, opened my mind.

Finally, RIP Jean Lewis (1932-2015), I am glad I followed your typically retired teacher advice and went back to university.

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Abbreviations

4WF	Fourth-Wave Feminist
ACT UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AoIR	Association of Internet Researchers
BAME	Black Asian and Minority Ethnic
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BMI	Body Mass Index
BPM	The Body Positive Movement
BPOCAs	Body Positive Organisations, Campaigns & Activists
BWOC	Black Women of Colour
CGI	Computer-Generated Imagery
CUFEMSOC	Cardiff University Feminist Society
DM	Direct Message
DRM	Design Research Methodology
ECA	Ethnographic Content Analysis
EDL	English Defence League
FAT	Feminist Fat Activists
FCP	Female Chauvinist Pig
FOLX	'Folks' with a non-normative sexual orientation/identity
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HAES	Health at Every Size
IM	Instant Messaging
IRL	In Real Life
LFWG	London Fat Women's Group
LYB	Love Your Body
NAAFA	National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance
NEDA	National Eating Disorders Association
NSM	New Social Movement Theory
NVDA	Non-Violent Direct Action
PPPO	Pretty Porky and Pissed Off
SMO	Social Movement Organisations
SMT	Social Movement Theory

SNT	Social Network Theory
SNS	Social Networking Site
SOC	Sense of Community
TLC	Toxic Links Coalition
VBOs	Visible Belly Outlines
WEP	The Women's Equality Party
WI	Women's Institute
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement
WNC	Weight Non-Conforming
WOC	Women of Colour
WSPU	The Women's Social and Political Union

Chapter 1: Introduction

According to feminist political theorist, Ros Hague (2011, pp.5-6) the term 'political agency' relates to one's ability to exercise choice in the resistance of oppressive identities. This thesis was developed during the 'first wave' of the COVID-19 global pandemic. At this juncture, targeted body policing towards fat populations was exacerbated when British prime minister, Boris Johnson declared a 'war on fat' (Swinford, 2020, p.1). After being admitted to intensive care with the coronavirus, Johnson projected a version of fat identity defined by individualist responsibility and abhorrence:

> I think the issue is that when I alas got this wretched thing [coronavirus] I was too fat. I was too fat. And if I may say so this is a teachable moment for our great country because we are one of the world's greatest places on earth, a great place on earth but alas, as a nation… we are slightly too fat. We are fatter than virtually anybody else in Europe apart from the Maltese for some reason, and we need to think about this (Johnson quoted in BBC, 2020a, np).

Miriam E. David (2016, p.234) warns that the fourth-wave 'selfie generation have their work cut out' in responding to the 'everyday misogyny' asserted by an 'ever-encroaching state.' This announcement incited public backlash, which confirmed that Instagrammers were 'thinking about' fat as Johnson instructed, yet in ways critically detached from dominant discourse. The body positive movement (BPM) responded by circulating visual statements against these discriminative government interventions. Figure 1.1 presents a selfie posted by Body Positive Amy. Its accompanying text radically avows: 'Boris, kiss my fat obese arse!' Fat female subjectivities were reclaimed from powerful white male interpretations, via internet image-making.

This opening chapter provides the context and explains the significance of this investigation into fat as a feminist issue through an analysis of the BPM. It begins by setting out the overall aim and research objectives of the dissertation. Here a detailed explanation is provided of how my research problem has emerged from key concerns surrounding objectification and intersectionality within current feminist debate. The chapter first explains how feminist theory is deployed as a conceptual framework to enable this original investigation into the BPM. Definitions of political activism and

agency are developed from within this feminist framework, in consultation with existing literature. Thereafter, theorisations of 'fourth-wave' feminism are introduced and discussion situates the rise of body positivity alongside its synonymous networked platforms. A comprehensive overview of the BPM is then provided. By situating this contemporary movement within the context of historical feminist activism a critical focus is drawn to the fat feminist activist's comparative invisibility within mainstream feminist literature. This lack of coverage is integral to my justification for revisiting fat as a feminist issue.

Figure 1.1

DIY Instagram self-portraiture is used to take a stand against state body policing.

Source: Body Positive Amy (2020)

Printed with written permission.

My rationale for focusing on the BPM - otherwise known as 'BoPo' (Cohen, et al., 2019a, p.3) - emanates from their status as a currently thriving expression of hashtivist organisation (#BodyPositive). This qualitative study gathers experiential data from those at the forefront of these mobilisations, the hashtaggers, who commonly self-identify as 'BoPo Warriors.' Body positivity is frequently labelled a 'movement,' but it is time to discover what these globally dispersed networks of 'warriors' are collectively fighting for. The capture of their voices is fundamental to understanding fat as a feminist issue in the digital age. This is essential as their pictures cannot do all the talking.

Nevertheless, images still maintain an intrinsic role within this protest study's data collection strategy. For decades, fat women have asserted their political position by riotously repositioning themselves within images. Significant emphasis will be devoted to comprehending what makes BoPo Warriors 'click' by documenting their motivating thought processes. However, this avenue of enquiry is not endeavoured at the expense of overlooking their pioneering photographic processes. Archival emphasis has played a major part in previous attempts (Cooper, 2016) to make the fat feminist protest identity known. My project adheres to this research tradition by gathering a substantial image dataset from a wide range of cultural repositories. Critical content analysis is applied to this image data across forthcoming chapters for the purpose of historically contextualising BPM behaviours and adding illustrative emphasis to leading arguments. Protest ephemera sourced from archives and libraries is situated side-by-side with current day Instagram output. While I argue that self-imaging is rapidly becoming the lifeblood of social media movements, grassroots artefacts evidence how image production has steadfastly remained a bedrock of feminist social movement activity.

Johansson (2020, p.114) indicates that the 'goal' of the BPM is 'to show diversity in the portrayal of women and to encourage the acceptance of all body types.' The BPM's most recent iteration on the Instagram social networking site (SNS) has individualist body display at its locus. These

exhibitionist behaviours raise important questions about what it means to participate in feminist activism following the advent of user-generated imaging platforms. My enquiry endeavours to understand if Instagrammers who employ so-called 'fourth-wave' feminist tools (hashtags, memes and selfies) align their digital behaviours as acts of fourth-wave feminist activism (Brantner, et al., 2020). A feminist research perspective works in tandem with social movement theory (SMT) and social network theory (SNT) frameworks to analyse these point-and-shoot trends towards embodied resistance. Such theoretical application is crucial to the task of discerning social media activity from 'social movement' activity.

An original contribution to knowledge is made by challenging existing coverage of women activists. In recognition of emerging feminine platforms and performative protest methods, an academic canon historically fixated on masculine framings of social movement activity is critiqued through a feminist lens (Ryan, 2006, p.173; Taylor, 1999). Drüeke and Elke Zobl (2012, p.11) declare that from first-wave suffragette pamphlet design to third-wave Riot Grrrl zine authorship, women have historically taken the tools of production to advance the distribution of feminist material. Despite 'the personal is political' signifying an established women's movement mantra, there is a need to know if the personal profiles of Instagrammers are considered 'political' by those partaking in hashtag behaviours.

Social media platforms pose a challenge to the classical man-made constitutions of 'social movement' activity (Charles, 2004). The gendered binaries surrounding cultural prescriptions of political protest create systemic exclusion. The activism and agency of women has been 'denied' and 'excluded' because of masculinity's traditional alignment with 'perceived strength' and 'resiliency' (Sutton, 2007, p.141). In comparison, female struggle is subordinated, due to women being perceived too fragile and vulnerable for the 'bodily risks' associated with frontline action (Sutton, 2007, p.141). Taylor & Whittier (1999, p.5) are leading critics of how SMT has ostracised a woman's position:

> Feminist scholars in sociology and other disciplines have been disheartened by the binary oppositions in social movements theory – for example, the distinction between expressive and instrumental politics, identity and strategic activism, cultural and structural change, and rational and emotional action.

My project seeks to refute this disregard for the contributions of female political consciousness exercised in public spaces. This will be achieved by comprehending and documenting the differences in activist expression, minus gendered delegitimisation. To quote the words of one Ukrainian women's rights activist from Channell-Justice's (2017, p.735) study: 'We're not just the sandwiches.' Since the early days of 1980s computer culture, queer and lesbian feminists built 'newsletter networks' to organise in the interests of gender equality (McKinney, 2020, np). My study is an act of interventionist scholarship through its validation of online female political activism and agency, in its own right.

Women lead cycles of resistance, as well as occupying subsidiary roles supporting male rational actors. This thesis corrects a data deficit by acknowledging how image-based internet technologies are infiltrating strategies for social change claims-making in our screen societies. In 2019, Millward & Takhar (2019, p.9) challenged the sociological community to continue developing 'high quality research' encompassing the diverse 'array of societal areas' from where 'collective action and protest emerge.' By selecting Instagram as a focal topic, my research amplifies formerly disenfranchised dissenting female voices. It introduces a broadened structural awareness of the virtual modalities adopted to make these voices heard. I explore how social media movements fit into existing ideas of social movement activity. This project proposes that virtual actions fail to be classified within the confines of traditional understanding of social movement activism. As a result, it is necessary to expand such understandings to ensure that new ways of protesting, via SNSs, are included in debates around how social change happens.

Research Aim

Bennett & Segerberg (2012) claim that SMT has experienced a shift from collective to connective action. 'The logic of connective action' relates how contemporary acts of contentious political action have become increasingly digitally enacted (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.742). Online communication processes, such as social media usage, are argued to be impacting on how political protest is organised and political agency is exercised. Gathering and analysing online protestor perspectives will facilitate the achievement of this project's overarching aim. This is to interrogate how Instagram profiles and the female body are utilised as sites of feminist protest. It will be argued that SMT must be expanded to include digitised forms of photo activism.

Research Objectives

The project's objectives are as follows:

- To investigate whether #BodyPositive hashtaggers consider themselves 'political' and whether this online 'connective' action overlaps with offline 'collective' action, in accordance with SNT.

- To survey Instagrammers to find out if visual mobilisation strategies are regarded as acts of 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004), in response to feminist concerns regarding aesthetical fixation and objectification.

- To develop an intersectional understanding of the BPM through charting the distribution of political activism and agency by building a participant profile.

- To analyse how hashtag feminism is challenging SMT conventions.

Research Problem

The following section outlines the research problem, which is two-fold. Firstly, substantial postfeminist critique has exposed a tension between

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female-enacted image events as empowering experiences and maintainers of patriarchal oppression. Gill & Elias (2014, p.180) observe the growth of love-your-body (LYB) discourses:

> positive, affirmative, seemingly feminist-inflected media messages targeted exclusively at girls and women, that exhort us to believe we are beautiful, to "remember" that we are "incredible" and that tell us that we have "the power" to "redefine" the "rules of beauty."

These discourses result in celebratory, but depoliticised, forms of fourth-wave feminism that fail to disrupt sexist structures. A theme manifest in body positive shows of 'self-love,' where the body shapes diversify, yet a state of unclothed body reductivism is maintained. In *The Politics of the Body*, Phipps (2014, p.4) argues that political goals are being 'co-opted,' 'lost' and 'transmuted' in exchange for an individualist onus on 'self-betterment goals' under the guise of women's liberation objectives.

My research builds on established enquiry through adopting the LYB concept in an analysis of how activism and agency are 'positively' enacted via the body by BPM members. A leading concern of postfeminist theory is the trend towards female agency becoming a 'bodily property:'

> Femininity is a bodily property, the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill, 2007, p.149).

The nude body's centrality to fourth-wave feminism risks perpetuating an oppressive cycle of gendered aesthetic fixation. The rise of raunch culture has positioned sex work practices of pole dancing and pornography as gateways to empowerment. This is a cultural shift Levy (2006, p.93) responded to by developing the term, 'female chauvinist pig' (FCP) to describe how women can be wilfully complicit in their own oppression. This is a finding observed through growing feminine tendencies to articulate individual 'agency' through being 'feminist strippers' (Levy, 2006, p.4).

My work makes an important intervention to feminist debate by documenting the motives behind BPM bodily displays. This avenue of enquiry is incentivised by the problematic clash of value systems between anti-pornography and sex-positive feminists historically referenced as 'the pornography wars' (Olufemi, 2020, p.51). These arguments continue to infiltrate current affairs. For example, in December 2020, the newly appointed equalities commissioner, Jessica Butcher, publicly denounced modern #MeToo feminisms:

> Feminism, like other forms of identity politics, has become obsessed with female victimhood… Working-class girls have been deprived of jobs that they love such as Page 3 girls and [Formula One] grid girls because other women disapprove of them. What happened to 'my body, my choice'? (Butcher quoted in Jayanetti, 2020, np).

In the interests of avoiding becoming another 'disapproving woman' academic, my project aims to apply analysis, rather than judgement, to the image events of BPM Instagrammers. I am interested in generating fresh insight through transparentising the motivations behind agentic choices made by feminists partaking in identity politics. The task is not a matter of morality, but one of gender equality, and distinguishing whether choices are made with social change generation in mind.

This analytical vantage point was initiated after cross-referencing parallels between these feminist concerns and common BPM tropes. Only a small amount of empirical data is currently held on members from the BPM. One such existing project, undertaken by Alentola (2017), raised concerns surrounding the sexualisation of the BPM's chosen mobilisation strategies. During a 381-picture content analysis of BPM Instagram posts, Alentola (2017, p.29) found that 59% featured underwear shots. This finding suggests that the BPM replicate rather than dismantle the systems of oppression they are supposed to challenge. In response to Alentola's (2017) findings, my research challenges if bodily emphasis is ever justified due to the risk of objectification, even if it is considered to be progressively body 'positive.'

In addition, Kite (2017; 2018) established the phrase 'bikini tyranny' to describe the rise of the 'swimsuit selfie,' a commonplace BPM virtual ritual. Kite (2018, np) implores: 'How did wearing a bikini become the gold standard for demonstrating body positivity?' Within her academic work and associated TEDx talk, Kite is apprehensive about the BPM's seemingly routine self-objectification. In *More Than a Body: Your Body is an Instrument, Not an Ornament* it is argued: 'If you take away the inspirational caption, it is more of the same: female bodies being bared, shared, compared, evaluated and ogled' (Kite & Kite, 2021, p.272). Such behaviours mean that BPM connective action is often indistinguishable from 'lad culture' manufactured for heteromale sexual gratification (Phipps, et al., 2017, p.1; Walter, 2010).

Body-baring traditions call into question the viability of Instagram as a protest site, or provider of what Harris (2004, p.156) termed 'border spaces' where users are able to create 'narratives that disrupt hegemonic discourses.' Lorna Finlayson (2016, pp.4-9) defines 'feminism' as follows:

> Feminism is a form of theory: the theory which identifies and opposes what it calls sexism, misogyny or patriarchy. But feminism is not just a matter of words; it is also a way of living and struggling against the status quo. This aspect is often treated as secondary… If it doesn't oppose the patriarchy, it's not feminism.

A central concern is ascertaining whether the BPM does in fact oppose the patriarchy. My investigation focuses on whether technology is being utilised in purposeful attempts to improve the lives of women, or contribute to their ongoing objectification. To meet project objectives, my data collection strategy concentrates on amassing frontline hashtagger testimonies to discern if exhibitionist digital behaviours are equated with 'empowerment.'

The second research problem questions the fact fourth-wave feminism is frequently defined as intersectional in outlook (Penny, 2018, p.124; Retallack, et al., 2016, p.86). Roxane Gay (2013, np) argues 'intersectionality, is the marrow within the bones of feminism. Without it, feminism will fracture even further.' Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) created the phraseology 'intersectionality' to describe how oppressive

structural constraints associated with identity characteristics (e.g., age, disability, gender, race) can temper the degree of agency a citizen can exercise. Recent publications have raised awareness about exclusionary practices, such as whitewashing[1], in feminist social movements (Trott, 2020; Wiens & MacDonald, 2020, p.2). These developments have led scholars to demand activists adopt an intersectional outlook to confront and actively resist privilege (Evans & Lépinard, 2019, p.289).

It has been argued (Valenti, 2007, p,174) that women had to occupy positions of relative affluence, influence and privilege to participate in so-called 'first-wave' feminism. In *Why I'm No Longer Talking About Race*, Eddo-Lodge (2018, p.164) argues that British feminism's legacy reads as 'a movement where everything was peaceful until the angry black people turned up.' Feminist historian Ana Stevenson (2019, p.19) has shown how racial divides were reinforced through the suffrage movement's casual appropriation of slave analogies. This is perhaps most vividly conveyed in Emmeline Pankhurst's turn-of-the-century statement, 'I'd rather be a rebel than a slave' (Stevenson, 2018, np).

Across the course of political protest, black women of colour (BWOC) became labelled as 'disruptive aggressors' (Eddo-Lodge, 2018, p.164). Depoliticised identities were imposed, whereby women of colour (WOC) were said to be treated like 'immigrants of feminism, unwelcome but tolerated' (Eddo-Lodge, 2018, p.165). The embodiment of black femininity was situated as other, or outside the campaign for gender equality. Race-based tensions meant that struggles largely remained separatist, and an 'interracial feminism' failed to materialise (Breines, 2007, p.21). This exclusionary protest heritage poses questions regarding whether history is being repeated in relation to current day expressions of hashtag feminism.

Darnell (2018, p.1) has described the BPM as 'intersectional' in how it

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[1] Whitewashing refers to the dominance of a white racialised version of truth, at the expense of encompassing multiracial perspectives.

advocates for 'personal worth' and 'unique beauty,' allegedly 'applied to women of all races and all cultures.' Their protest claims to act in the interests of promoting body diversity, liberation and multivocality. Carbin & Edenheim (2013, pp.233-234) suggest that feminism has undergone an 'intersectional turn.' The movement is said to have shifted towards an 'all-inclusive' orientation on the basis that intersectionality no longer signifies a 'threat' to white feminism (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, pp.233-234). LYB discourses are nonetheless prone to purveying an enforced homogenisation of bodies to the erasure of difference. This amalgamating tendency is exhibited through the BPM's mantra, 'all bodies are good bodies,' which encourages a one-size-fits-all standpoint. In the words of Audre Lorde (2019, p.51): 'Black feminism is not white feminism with black face. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as black women.'

During 2017, Helana Darwin undertook a discourse analysis of body positive blog posts to challenge whether movement activity signified 'feminist progress' (Darwin, 2017, p.1). Results from such data collection conceded that, despite increasingly intersectional contemporary sensibilities, 'the same ideological schisms that divided women during the late 1960s and early 1970s have been reproduced within the Body Positive Movement' (Darwin, 2017, p.8). A leading shortcoming was the lack of multivocality. Existing literature suggests that failure to amplify WOC is not a new phenomenon, unique to fourth-wave mobilisations, as previous waves of feminist activism have shown little regard for the struggle for racial equality.

Moreover, I respond to criticisms raised by Phipps (2020, p.6) who claimed that the 'mainstream Anglo-American movement is often taken to represent feminism, when in fact it does not.' These concerns have been directly targeted at hashtag feminism. Postfeminist theorists argue hashtag campaigns, such as the 2014 #BringBackOurGirls movement, serve to perpetuate a colonialist 'rescue' feminism (Gill, 2016, p.616). This presents a 'comfortable' mobilisation strategy for Westernised women to position black feminism as out 'there' in the 'Third World' to the omission of localised, black,

British, feminist activism (Gill, 2016, p.616). Corrigan (2019, p.264) departs from feminist scholarship's euphoria expressed towards the 2017 #MeToo movement on the basis that this was a hashtag started by a black woman – Tarana Burke – ten years before being 'hijacked' by white women (Wypijewski, 2020, p.52).

Informed by feminist histories uncovered during the literature review, my project wishes to see if internal colour-based hierarchies continue to pervade an alleged fourth-wave of hashtag feminism. In *White Woman Listen!*, Carby (1982, p.52) challenged the inclusive boundaries of the 'sisterhood' when she demanded: 'Of white feminists we must ask, what exactly do you mean when you say "we"?' Similarly, my research contribution originates from answering who the BPM means when they say, 'all bodies.' The production of a participant profile fulfils a core study outcome to present how ethnicities are socio-demographically represented in the BPM.

This section has isolated two significant areas of contention within current feminist debate my project seeks to address. The following section discusses how feminism is applied as a conceptual framework across my study by establishing working definitions of 'agency' and 'activism' within this perspective.

Feminist Women and Political Agency

Feminist theory has historically been interested in how political consciousness can be exercised in personal spaces. It recognises that women can possess political agency through the autonomous creation of 'critical spaces' (Takhar, 2013, p.ii). These 'feminist counterspaces' are also termed 'breathing spaces,' which women have traditionally forged within the 'cultural contexts of classic patriarchy' (Datta, 2020, p.1). Fenton (2016, p.24) notably referred to this as the 'politics of being.' This is a decentralised domestication of political agency explained as a social outcome of gendered exclusion from public life. For example, women's institutional exemption from democratic voting processes and ongoing denial of equal parliamentary

representation (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005, p.783). Narrow notions of civic participation grounded in 'liberal democracy' have long been incongruent with feminist political consciousness (Fenton, 2008, p.55).

Within a feminist framework, my leading concepts of political 'activism' and 'agency' are associated with possession of a norm-defiant mindset, as opposed to being enshrined in an allocated social scenario. The home can be a site of social change, as much as the House of Commons. I contribute to a rich provenance of feminist analysis into how women develop political identities beyond being 'women in a men's House' (Beaumont, 2020a, np). As Jenkins (2021, p.19) observes regarding 20th century suffrage: 'The family home was not a haven removed from political concerns but often a place where politics were formed, debated, and strengthened.' Feminist activist labour can be a domestic form of labour. The fluid constitution of female political activism and agency was an integral theme of 1970s second-wave feminist protest (Sowards & Renegar, 2004). The 'See Red Women's Workshop' was formed in 1974 by three former art students. They grouped together to create positive images to counter mainstream sexist representations. Figure 1.2 features one of their artworks from 1977. *Sisters!* illustrates how informal spaces present opportunities for everyday feminist protest against misogyny. This emphasis on political action being carried out in private, as well as public spaces, continues to inform contemporary approaches to feminist activism. Women made a stand against drink and injection spiking in nightclubs by staying at home for one evening (27th October 2021) as part of the #Girl's-Night-In boycott.

Identity politics have been, and remain to be, a lynchpin of feminist political action. Contrastingly, within patriarchal perceptions of political engagement women are passively objectified as 'lacking in agency' based on their perceived 'failure' to participate in bureaucratic structures (Takhar, 2013, p.2). This depoliticisation stems from widespread ignorance shown towards feminine forms of political action. For instance, the circumvention of 'natural' gendered norms women and girls feel 'held hostage' to within sexist schemas (Ringrose & Renold, 2010, p.585). Feminist conceptualisations

interrupt a suffocating longevity of patriarchal power relations responsible for enforcing their hegemonic brand of 'political' discourse.

Figure 1.2

Sisters! (1977)

Source: See Red Women's Workshop

According to Takhar (2013, p.1) political agency is evidenced through women's active and critical responses to subordinative scripts. The application of this feminist framework is fundamental to my investigation. It is through the conceptual parameters of feminist thinking that the activist energies of fat women publicly wearing a swimsuit, taking a selfie, or quitting dieting as part of resistant embodied subjectivities are acknowledged. Takhar (2013, p.1) stresses there is a need to broaden notions of political agency to start recognising instances of empowerment unfolding on a micro scale within community spaces. She deems this disruption 'rocking the stereotype' of political participation traditionally fixated on formal democratic processes (Takhar, 2013, p.1).

Feminism acts a conceptual framework in relation to my work because it situates political agency wherever and whenever women choose to pushback against sexist structures. Political activism and agency are said to take place once women reject 'situations and statuses conferred on them' (Scott, 1992, p.34). Fat female populations are frequently pushed to the margins of society and ascribed an outsider status within dominant discourse. Vivienne (2017, p.126) explains that selfies offer an empowerment source for 'body-positive feminists' to defy hegemonic scripts and say: 'I will not hate myself because you cannot accept me.' As Renold & Ringrose (2011, p.396) explored in connection with older SNS, Bebo, females can instrumentalise their bodies in agentic online display as part of identities which resist their sexualisation. Western culture implores us to believe it is social taboo to embody an 'unruly fat pig woman' identity and be positive about it (Rowe, 2011, p.42). Feminist framings locate political agency in the fight back from fringe groups to take ownership of their othered status (Takhar, 2013, p.34) and reframe deviant identities as part of 'positive counter-narratives' (Pickett Miller & Platenburg, 2021, p.14). The danger with 'postfeminist panics' (Ringrose, 2013, p.10) surrounding online sexualisation and FCPs is that they can obscure fat women's critical embodied attempts to eschew their 'piggish' status.

Feminist understandings of political agency are not defined by dress-code or

domain. Political subjects can still be regarded as such, whether they are wearing a suit, or a swimsuit. Takhar (2013, p.4) observes, 'agency can be considered to be a dynamic space of maneuver [sic].' Away from prescriptive male-coded notions, feminist scholarship recognises there is no 'right' way of commencing political engagement. Instead, interpretations prioritise the presence of a radical outlook set on dismantling dominant worldviews and unseating stereotypes. Nevertheless, Takhar (2013, p.4) concedes that collective definitions can only absorb 'non-traditional forms of political activity' by departing from 'masculine understandings of political agency.'

Throughout its approach, this thesis acknowledges there has been a necessary 'archival turn in feminism' (Eichhorn, 2014). Feminist researchers are accommodating unofficial 'sites of storytelling' into the study of activism to redress 'women's erasure from the public record' (McDaneld, 2017, p.53). My social media research supplements these efforts; Instagrammers appear to be contributing to an ongoing feminist protest cycle orientated in a 'self-publication model' (Coman, 2021, np). Bracke (2014, p.28) notes that since the 1970s, feminist groups produced pamphlets and meeting minutes driven by a 'utopian desire to start history afresh' and reinvent perceptions of political activity. A key strength of my work is the challenge it poses to orthodox views of activism and agency. However, this challenge can only be achieved by appraising 'unorthodox' political outlets. In the interests of broadening knowledge about women's political behaviours, attempts are made to evaluate a wider range of protest literature by integrating 'Cut-and-Paste' citizen modes of production into the scope of my study (Bleyer, 2004, p.42).

Feminist archivists (Iglikowski-Broad, 2021, np) accuse knowledge repositories of gender bias in how male-dominated political and military histories are prioritised in collection building processes. Iglikowski-Broad (2021, np) argues women's chosen paths to achieving social justice become lost in the writing of history when the social and cultural spheres they occupy most are overlooked and systemically devalued. Marginalised voices are

rendered absent from collective understandings of activism when male mediations of 'history' show little regard for accommodating 'herstories' (Mackay, 2015, p.14). For example, a recent social movement study suggested the proactive frontline contribution women made to 1980s Miners' Strikes is severely downplayed because protests are routinely recalled from a male perspective (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite & Thomlinson, 2020, p.25). 'Cultural sexism' permeates decision-making about what types of activism and agency are of historical significance (Savigny, 2020, p.130). The outcome is that an unreliable and incomplete picture of protest gets projected by privileged gatekeepers. This signifies a gendered imbalance in coverage my research strives to help redress.

The patriarchal organisation of society has not worked in favour of preserving democracy. This work answers calls to amplify localised and feminised forms of 'imagining and representing "uneventful" lives' by committing women's bottom-up 'histories of everyday life' to academic record (Carter, 2021, p.4). The study of resistance requires a shakeup. My project delivers this through analysis of an active case study to uncover the multifaceted aspects of female agency and challenge what constitutes 'activism.' It endeavours to ensure the political identities of hashtag feminists are included in accounts of activism for prosperity to appreciate the full range of protest possibilities deployed by women. This is a conscious act of cultural conservation taken by a feminist researcher to guarantee that those mobilising to make a big difference in small ways are not forgotten in future discussions about activism.

Across my chapters, this thesis depicts the intrinsic role activist image production has played in historic feminist revolt. An action taken as part of its mission to ensure history does not repeat itself by dismissing the contribution of makers to women's liberation efforts. Currently, there is a 'hidden heritage' relating how 'aesthetic protest' has been adopted by female artists and crafters (Callen, 1979; Walker, 1980, pp.69-71). This is because their activity is downplayed as an inconsequential 'spin off' of the feminist movement (Walker, 1980, pp.69-71). Through the BPM, I explore how body

self-portraiture is being used to make 'arguments' within hashtag feminist claims-making (Harold, 1999, p.66). In recentring fat as a feminist issue, my study responds to calls from Widdows (2018, p.1) to stop dismissing beauty as 'trivial fluff' and 'not a serious subject.' Feminist scholars warn it is 'dangerous' (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p.4) when enterprising outlets, such as selfies, are delegitimised as the antithesis of 'real agency' and disregarded as the activity of 'narcissists' (Caldeira, et. al, 2018a, p.39; Iqani & Schroeder, 2016, p.411). Kuntsman (2017, p.14) suggests 'selfie citizenship' is recognised for its political re-representation of erased populations and non-conformist identities. A stance attuned to body positive advocates, such as Jes Baker (2015, p.101), who attests: 'We can change the photoshop culture with our phones.'

Feminist thinker, Patricia Mann (1994, p.17) implores 'it is necessary to expand the vocabulary of political actions to make sense of individual agency' during times of change. SNSs have initiated what Mann (1994) described as an 'unmooring' where socially meaningful struggles are re-routed to new sites of 'micro-politics' following great transformation. To quote Dahl Crossley (2019, p.64), 'young feminists are online' and it is imperative for feminist scholars to overcome their 'blind spots' by engaging with networked technologies. Sociologists have recognised Instagram uptake by schoolgirls to resist body moderation imposed by sexist societal structures (Retallack, et al., 2016). My research makes an empirical contribution to ongoing academic dialogues starting to situate Instagram posts as 'political performances' (Einwohner & Rochford, 2019, p.1090). Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has gained recognition as the 'feminine' SNS due to its predominantly female usership (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017, p.323; Tovar & McGregor, 2017, p.149). Setting the scope of this research to incorporate 'Instagram Feminism' is critical to understanding the future of feminist activism (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). The next section explores theorisations of 'fourth-wave' protest founded on these networked interactions.

Theorising Fourth-Wave Feminism

Baer (2016, p.17) declares that a 'renewed feminism' has emerged 'from the interface of digital platforms and activism,' where SNSs have affected the ways contemporary feminists assemble. More recently, Coffey & Kanai (2021, np) located the 'feminist fire' of mobilisation firmly online where SNSs signify 'key sites through which feminist knowledges are dispersed, taken up, and debated.' This societal shift is recognised through Instagram's prime placement within my study's critical analysis.

Discussion surrounding the 'fourth-wave' feminist label started to circulate before Instagram's conception. Jessica Valenti, founder of Feministing.com, was asked in a 2009 interview with *The New York Times* if she self-identified as a 'third-wave feminist' (Zimmerman, 2017, p.56). Third-wave feminism is frequently defined in terms of how it compensates for second-wave shortcomings (Hewitt, 2010, p.4). Theorisations emphasise the promotion of an inclusive global perspective to exceed the overbearing westernised outlook that blighted previous waves (Zack, 2005, p.3). Valenti renounced third-wave alignment by suggesting instead: 'maybe the fourth wave is online' and debate amongst feminist theorists has ensued ever since (Solomon, 2009, np).

Jennifer Baumgardner (2011, p.251) observes the transition from third-wave to fourth-wave feminism as follows:

> In place of zines and songs, young feminists created blogs, Twitter campaigns, and online media with names like Racialicious and Feministing, or wrote for Jezebel and Salon's Broadsheet. They commented on the news, posted their most stylish plus-size fashion photos about info about where to shop, and tweeted that they too, had had an abortion.

The virtual medium of mobilisation has proven integral to surfacing understandings; Knappe & Lang (2014) herald the arrival of a feminist fourth wave defined entirely by its digital delivery. Social media users are positioned as active social change agents who 'use the web to re-link older and newer organisations, foster stronger networks and encourage outreach

to a new generation' (Knappe & Lang, 2014, p.364).

Many feminist thinkers (Chamberlain, 2017; Munro, 2013; Rivers, 2017)
regard reliance on networked advocacy to signal an emerging feminist fourth
wave. On 10th December 2013, Kira Cochrane wrote an article for *The
Guardian* newspaper, entitled, 'The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel
women.' Highly technologically deterministic in her notion, Cochrane (2013a,
np) lamented the apparent demise of the women's movement throughout the
1990s 'ladette years,' only for the internet to catalyse an 'awakening.' The
article was later published in eBook format; in which Cochrane (2013b, np)
observes how a groundswell of female-fronted connective action introduced
'new feminists' characterised by their tendency to take their struggle both, to
the streets and the web. Subsequently, Cochrane's commentary informs the
development of a core research concern. It contains an assumption that
online expressions of hashtag feminism are supported by offline direct
action. This is an unsubstantiated claim. Through data collection, I generate
an evidence base to provide this missing knowledge relating fourth-wave
feminist protest behaviours.

Fourth-wave feminist frameworks expand the scope of political activism and
agency (Blevins, 2018). They recognise that 1970s consciousness-raising
processes are now being actively 'reinvigorated' through Web 2.0 tools
(Loney-Howes, 2020, p.34). Consciousness-raising was a prevalent protest
feature of second-wave feminism. By sharing stories of struggle in groups,
women heightened awareness of structural inequalities, with a view to
generate social change outcomes. Similarly, digital discursive activism is
user-generated and utilises citizen channels to organise shared sentiment
against oppression following a comparable communal dynamic. Clark (2016,
p.788) claims that hashtag feminism signifies the ongoing 'extension of the
feminist movement's historically rooted discursive tactics.' At present, this is
unfounded with regards to BPM Instagramming.

Techno-optimists conceptualise the hashtag as a democratising digital tool
utilised by activists to collate stories surrounding social justice issues

(Thompson, 2020, p.23). Nonetheless, not all peer-to-peer sharing is undertaken with a view to generate social change outcomes. For instance, von Driel & Dumitrica (2020) raised awareness of the increasing professionalisation of Instagram influencers, chasing 'likes' through user engagement to appeal to advertisers. Braithwaite & DeAndrea (2021, np) refer to this 'undermining' corporate commodification as the 'BoPopriation' of the BPM. An increase in digital female interaction does not automatically translate into increased 'feminist' intent.

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by collecting 'activist wisdom' (Maddison & Scalmer, 2006). This is done to openly assess whether personal profiles are perceived as 'feminist' or 'political' by those directly engaged in content creation. Transmedia activist, Lina Srivastava implores: 'We have to recognize [sic] that agency and self-representation are crucial to social change… and people's perspectives of their own situations matter' (Srivastava quoted in Jenkins, 2016, np). Forms of feminist protest can often be undertaken in pursuit of ideological or cultural transformation and not always 'orientated in pressuring policy-makers' (Mendes, et al., 2019, p.35). A tradition that appears to inform developing activism and agency in our screen societies. As articulated by one girl feminist blogger taking part in an online feminisms study:

> It was through blogging that I realized [sic] changing policies isn't the only way to define activism – I think activism is also about changing hearts and minds, which is what I do (or try to do) when I blog (Keller, 2013, p.6).

Social movement theorists, such as Touraine (2004), further observe how there has been a shift from social movements to cultural movements. This has been deemed an outcome of information and communications societies characterised by a lack of 'concrete forms of organisation or production' (Touraine, 2004, p.722). In a recent seminar for Chester's Institute of Gender Studies, Linda Scott (2021, np) stressed this need to start evidencing protest which 'rather than stopping traffic, tries to change minds' and move feminism forward.

Classical social movement theorist, Blumer argued that a social problem does not 'exist until and unless it is recognised as such by society' (Stacey, 2018, p.25). Social media traffic is not exclusively invested in social justice missions. In June 2018, the Instagram app reached 1 billion monthly active users. It is important to note that not all crowds necessarily formulate around a cause. Work undertaken by Kristofferson, White & Peloza (2014, p.1149) found that when social media users made 'token' shows of support online, such as joining a Facebook group or signing a petition, they did so to 'present a positive image to others' and it often did not preclude more meaningful action. Therefore, it is vital to distinguish, through the BPM, whether this concentration of collective Instagram activity is evidence of amassing virtual political activism, whereby the app serves as a site of protest. Or whether these vast hashtagging networks merely reflect audiences interacting on the latest populist online playground to pass the time of day. The following sections provide a detailed overview of the BPM and situate their Instagram activity within this fourth-wave feminist framework.

The Body Positive Movement (BPM)

Schlesselman-Tarango (2013) states that the evolution of the hashtag has now surpassed its original descriptive purpose to function as a means for users to build online group identities. The BPM presents one such group identity. The very first #BodyPositive hashtag only entered public circulation, at least via the Instagram platform, circa 2012 (Cwynar-Horta, 2016a, p.37). It has since been included in 17,092,109 Instagram posts. The hashtag is a character (#) that acts as a piece of metadata to collate identical phraseologies from different users together. Rambukkana (2015) describes the resulting discursive communities as 'hashtag publics.' The hyperlink is perfunctory in conjoining shared subject matter across profiles and enabling wider connections. Studies suggest that women are embarking on global community-building via 'citizen journalism' as a mode of 'cyber feminist' self-organisation (Gheytanchi & Moghadam, 2014, p.1). My project breaks down delimiting notions of 'social movement' activity by exploring these feminised

and virtual emerging expressions through the BPM.

Crabbe (2017, p.76) indicates that body positivity is: 'about accepting our bodies as they are, at any size, and challenging the oppressive systems that teach us we aren't allowed to do that.' My research gathers an evidence base to factually document how this challenge is mobilised by Instagrammers. BPM protest aims to achieve enhanced public exposure to non-hegemonic gendered bodily representations and in turn, enhance their social acceptability (Caldeira, et al., 2018a, p.37). Common movement mantras consist of: The Body Is Not an Apology, Beauty Has No Size, Honour My Curves, Curves Are Not a Crime and All Bodies Are Good Bodies. All these sentiments stand readily aligned with feminist protest's established placard strapline urging women to: Take Up Space (Pausé & Grey, 2018).

Gender studies scholarship has already drawn attention to how female self-surveillance on SNSs has sought to suppress fatness with the view to uphold sexually desirable idealised femininities (Ringrose, 2010, pp.176-177). In contrast, BPM content creators challenge the world to see their unmediated and non-airbrushed cellulite, disabilities, fat rolls, scarring and stretch marks. During previous study into fat activism, Gimlin (2002, p.139) noted that women engage in micro acts of civil disobedience through 'deviance disavowal.' Deviance disavowal refers to how women make embodied claims of political agency by violating patriarchal body norms and positively reaffirming their fat feminine identity. This is a gesture of resistance because the body is operationalised as part of an active process of re-representation.

Hashtaggers appear to be building on this provenance by posting photographs of renegotiated fat-positive subjectivities on SNSs. Crowhurst (2020) cites the BPM as contributors to a rich history of modern feminism founded on 'badly behaved women.' During 1968 Miss America beauty pageant demonstrations, women's rights campaigners threw 'instruments of female torture' such as high heels and girdles into a 'Freedom Trash Can' (Hanisch, 2007, p.199). Likewise, BPM members publicly remonstrate their

wilful withdrawal from subservient scripts of inch-pinching and calorie-counting. Irrespective of whether feminists occupy physical space, or computer hard drive space, considerable crossover exists in underlying political sentiment (Darwin, 2017, p.2).

Figure 1.3

Fuck the Patriarchy! by Jameela Jamil from Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights, The British Library

Source: Author's Own Photography (2021)

Feminist literature reveals a protest lineage of women channelling political agency through performative public statements of non-compliance. As Helen Lewis (2021) rightfully reminds us, across the ages, it is 'difficult women' who have prospered as pioneers gaining rights for womankind. Feminist political action has not been retrospectively defined so much by how women behave, but by how women misbehave. Historical protest documents equate social scripts promoting gendered weight control with social control. In her article, 'Thin Women Can Bite Me,' Erin Fitzgerald (1995, np) writes:

> I am what experts call a "big girl". I'm 5'10" and don't have a scale –
> though the last time I went to the gynaecologist, I clocked in at 240[2].
> This makes me just big enough to annoy people… I am supposed to
> recognize [sic] my station in life and stay home to eat cardboard.

The visual arts signify a key outlet for feminists to commit gender transgressions. Moreover, fat persists to be a prominent feminist issue. Only emphasised by the presence of Jameela Jamil's weighing scales emblazoned with: 'Fuck the Patriarchy!' in The British Library's recent *Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights* (2021) exhibition (See Fig 1.3). Jamil's installation adheres to this established tradition of feminists staking claim to contentious and non-conformist gender identities through artistic spectacle.

Selfies mutually provide women with critical spaces to reclaim their political agency from patriarchal ideologies. For instance, Figure 1.4 suggests the body and Instagram can work in tandem to produce declarative statements of defiance. The subject has written: 'WEAR THE DAMN SHORTS' upon their dimpled thigh to pushback against social expectations imploring women to censor visible indicators of fatness. A rhetoric of resistance, as opposed to passivity, is observable in these reclamations of body ownership. Tovar (2020, p.36) describes the 'radical body positive' position:

> I was tired of being afraid of a word. So I decided to reclaim "fat" and
> make it my own. A lot of other groups of people who have been made
> to feel shame have reclaimed words they were afraid of, like "queer"
> or "black" or "cripple."

Once publicly presented, the rotund female body becomes implicit as a site of dissent against oppressive social norms suggesting the occurrence of agentic online activity. Brouwer (2005, p.358) coined the term, 'corporeal expressivity' to describe how the body can function as a protest site, through 'emphasizing [sic] the salience of flesh and body in the production of rhetorical acts.' The renewed publisher flexibility, enabled by SNSs, means that BPM members can 'proudly display larger bodies with captions like "it's possible to love your belly rolls"' (Cohen, et al., 2019b, p.1548). Fat Studies

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[2] This is 17 stone 2lbs in British weight measurement terms.

scholars describe how activists 'recode fat bodies with a discourse of pleasure' as 'queer camp' (Brown & Herndon, 2019, np).

Figure 1.4

A selfie using the body as an active message carrier in Instagram hashtivism.

Source: Georgina Cox (2020)

Printed with written permission.

adrienne maree brown (2019, p.13) situates performative protest behaviours as part of a broader tilt towards 'pleasure activism,' whereby 'satisfaction, joy and erotic aliveness' are utilised to 'bring about social and political change.' Nevertheless, it remains unfounded if BPM hashtagging is broadly endeavoured with the political motivations essential to the 'pleasure activism' archetype (brown, 2019). An emoji can smile and publicly purvey a positive disposition, yet this digital object does not constitute a social movement. In *Feminism for Women: The Real Route to Liberation* (2021), Julie Bindel expresses concern about the current 'state' of feminism. She observes: 'Right now, what passes for feminism is often anything but; it bends over backwards to accommodate the rights and feelings of men but leaves women out in the cold' (Bindel, 2021, p.1). In response, one of my key research objectives centres on interrogating #BodyPositive Instagrammers to

comprehend if they self-identify their digital behaviours as feminist political action.

This study produces research informed contributions to assess if social change incentives underlie the BPM's potential expressions of photographic 'pleasure activism' (brown, 2019). The resulting introspective qualitative survey feedback fills a data deficit. In an ever-changing multi-platform protest climate, Pickard (2019, p.80) cautions against applying closed definitions to the study of 21st century political dissent. Pickard (2019, p.59) stresses that political participation is not merely 'period sensitive' in terms of technological capability, but 'beholder sensitive,' meaning only individual 'creators, users and actors' can explain their personal motivations. By initiating subject-centred critical dialogue, I deliver some clarity in this area.

Feminist spaces are culturally constituted and therefore, fluid in formation. Ketcham Weber, et al. (2008, np) explain: 'feminist spaces are DONE and are defined and re-defined as they happen. DOING feminism means taking up space, shaping space, moving space, and making space for action.' The BPM channel their agency through newly presented flattened communication hierarchies, of what Fuchs (2013, p.24) deems, self-managed and 'commons-based' protest media online. My project reacts to how women are capitalising on networked opportunities to contest patriarchal framings of their bodies. For example, Figure 1.5 features a postcard designed by Robert McGill presenting a 20th century masculine framing of fat female identity, as a mainstream object of ridicule. In comparison, pictured below, is an Instagram meme published to reject imposed derogatory depictions through 'positive' embodied resistance.
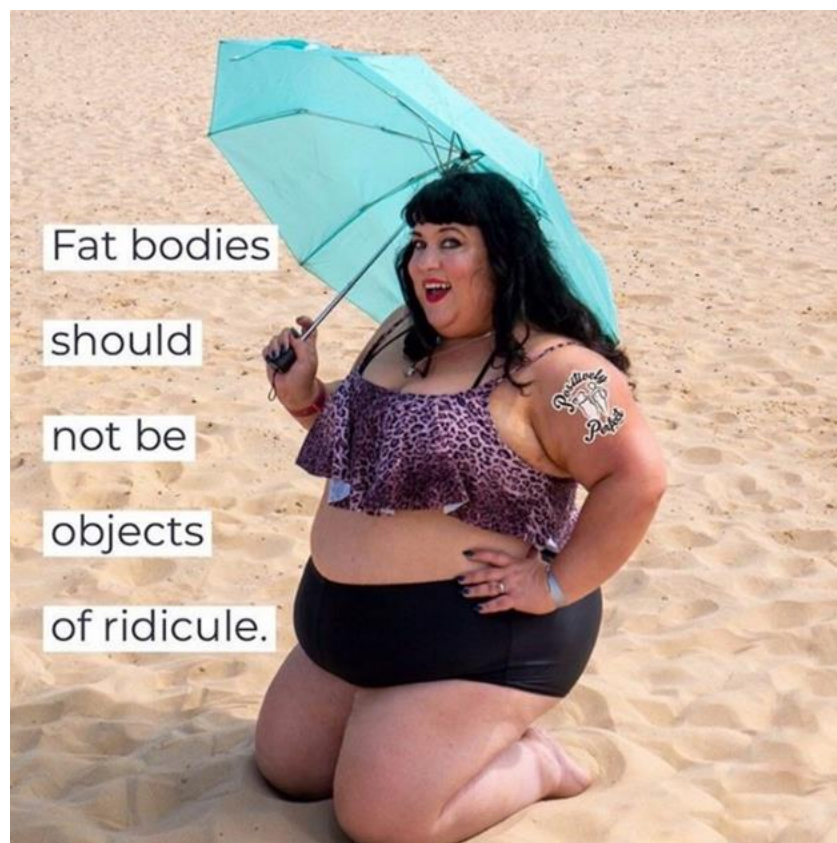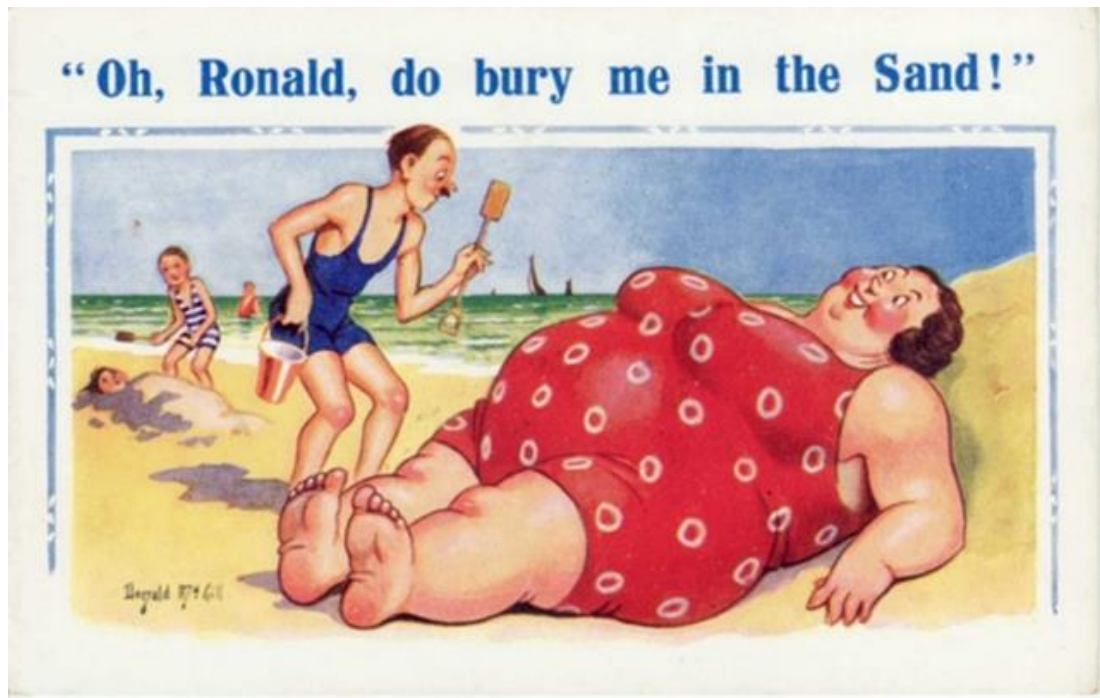
Figure 1.5

Contrasting depictions of fat femininity, from 20th century male-defined representations to 21st century Instagram self-representations.

Source: Donald McGill Museum (c.1940s-1950s) & Kiteh (2020)
        Both printed with written permission.

Historian, Laura Carter (2021, p.187) argues 'tools of selfhood' have timelessly helped 'citizens negotiate and absorb culture on their own terms.' SNSs are said to present opportunities for the 'underdog to strike back,' especially in the re-framing of 'female body fat' (Elmadağlı, 2016, p.8). Tiidenberg (2018, p.50) positions the selfie as integral to the BPM's mission to celebrate bodies 'as they really are' through new media. Hashtaggers rely on bodily exhibitionism as a means of 'empowerment' (Caldeira & De Ridder 2017; Cwynar-Horta, 2016a; Koskela, 2004). A process of digitally-orchestrated self-exposure referred to by Sastre (2014, p.936) as, the arising 'hyper-visible body.' Tovar (2012, p.7) recounts how individual agency is enacted via strategies of self-empowering exhibitionism:

> The f-word [fat] is used to scare women, but it doesn't scare me. My fat is political because when I show it off it really seems to piss people off. My fat is political because I'm keeping it. My fat is political because it's fucking hot. My fat is my flag, my claim to fame, my battle scar, my secret fat girl society badge.

In his landmark 1963 publication, *Stigma*, Irving Goffman detailed how self-elevation can be used as a subversive tactic against stigmatising treatment (Goffman, 1963, p.31). Fat has been described as a 'social justice issue' (Cooper Stoll, 2019, p.421). A classification granted on the basis that, like many marginalised groups, fat citizens encounter 'discrimination in employment, the media, politics, interpersonal relationships and health care' (Cooper Stoll, 2019, p.423). Linguistically-imposed structures situate fatness as a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1990, p.31). McMicheal (2013, np) explains: 'Fat is a dirty word in our society. We use euphemisms like "large", "big", "curvy", "zaftig", "fluffy"… and "thick" to avoid that nasty, nasty word.'

The joyous use of 'fat' as a self-descriptor forms part of the BPM's prudent efforts to transform body narratives by normalising it (Thomas, 2019, p.51). Instagrammers reclaim this adjective in a 'hypervisible' collective positive 'rethinking' of weight stigma (Saguy & Ward, 2011, p.53) as fat acceptance by 'coming out as fat' (Pausé, 2012, p.42). BPM digital group dynamics engage in what Goffman (1986, p.108) termed 'self-contradiction.' Achieved through the wilful adoption of 'ambivalent identities' to subvert scripts of

shame projected upon their non-conforming body types (Goffman, 1986, p.108). Body narratives are overhauled online, as female audiences are exposed to the prospect of fostering an alternative 'relationality' with their bodies (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015, p.77).

This trend towards embodied performative politics has infiltrated academic interpretations of 'activism.' A progressive guiding framework is provided by DeLuca (1999). His work sought to classify the burgeoning visuality of agentic bodies being utilised for protest purposes. Most notably, DeLuca (1999, pp.9-10) coined the term, 'image event' to describe how activists:

> slight formal modes of public argument… activist groups practice an alternative image politics, performing image events designed for mass media dissemination. Often, image events revolve around images of bodies - vulnerable bodies, dangerous bodies, taboo bodies, ludicrous bodies, transfigured bodies. These political bodies constitute a nascent body rhetoric that deploys bodies as a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argumentation.

An image event can prove instrumental to resisting entrenched gendered cultural assumptions. Rebecca Coleman (2008, p.163) implores fellow feminist scholars to break from the traditional 'subject/object' dichotomy to instead see women's bodies in a knowing state of 'becoming,' understood and experienced through images.

Instagram's user-generated imaging capabilities hold potential for fat women to 'become' just that - fat women - away from stigmatising identifiers such as 'obese' or 'overweight' (Bombak, 2016, p.681). Coffey (2021, np) suggests images are not simply fixed points of representation, they can be interpreted as 'potentials' to 'open up' challenging new conversations. Alternative 'resister' subjectivities (Verriet, 2021) coexist alongside media witch hunts portraying fat populations as social pariahs burdening health services due to their assumed unhealthy lifestyles (Matacin & Simone, 2019). A recent study (Rodgers, et al., 2020, p.199) found the 'original feminist tenets' of body positivity, vested in 'retraining the eye towards more realistic representations of the body,' present in digital content. High levels of explicit feminist self-identification were witnessed through user rejection of the thin ideal

(Rodgers, et al., 2020, p.204). However, Rodgers, et al.'s (2020) investigation was curtailed to merely consider discursive interactions on the online forum, Reddit.

My objectives recognise a knowledge gap exists regarding whether hashtaggers are achieving self-actualisation and experiencing empowerment from engaging in internet image events. Beaumont (2013, pp.2-3) has called for revision of the term 'women's movement' to accommodate a broader understanding of 'female agency.' She argues feminist political agency can reside wherever activism attempts to improve the status of women. Only a sparse number of publications feature testimonies obtained directly from BPM members; one such source is grassroots zines. A key strength of my research is its drive to draw activist voices out from the recesses of archives to position them prominently within political debate (Robinson, 2018). In Nottingham zine, *Fan Club*, Rachel Nelson (2016, p.6) speaks of the 'revolutionary contentment' experienced as part of the BPM after being socially conditioned to see the fat body as flawed:

> I first encountered the body positivity movement on tumblr. Fat women were joyously claiming the word fat and applying it unashamedly to themselves. They wore it on t-shirts, on necklaces; they even tattooed it on their bodies. They posted photos of themselves and wrote about their love for their body and their right to celebrate their own existence on earth. This felt radical to me. I had never seen photos of fat thighs, stretch-marks, or bodily hair, unless they were being used as a weapon to shame women.

This first-hand perspective illuminates the potentiality for empowerment to be experienced via peer-to-peer photography exchange. Nonetheless, the interactions cited took place on the Tumblr platform. Tumblr is a microblogging SNS, which was originally founded in 2007. During the late noughties, Tumblr was noted (Schultz, 2015) for providing fat acceptance activists with the opportunity to forge 'enclave spaces' deemed integral to social movement activity (Bolden, 2018, p.5). Although still in operation, Tumblr's popularity has since waned considerably in wake of newer SNSs, such as Instagram.

Figure 1.6

Across the decades, DIY media production is seen to improve a woman's position by granting greater input over decision making about their body narratives.

Source: (*Left*) LSE Women's Library (c.1980s-1990s) Ref: UKLSE-DL1BP010010030001
(*Right*) Grrrl Zine Fair (2020) Printed with written permission.

My thesis carries forward this level of qualitative capture in its assessment of women's empowerment processes on a mass-subscribed imaging application. Contemporary feminist debate is advanced by this commitment to map mobilisations as they unfold on the 'next big thing.' This research responds to claims from Mahoney (2020, np) that Instagram has introduced a 'visual economy,' whereby feminists now 'perform their political beliefs' by turning the 'camera on themselves' to articulate a resistant visibility. It is important to initiate analysis on a SNS presently populated by women trying to disrupt hegemonic beauty standards with technology (Caldeira, et. al, 2018a, p.25). Previously, 'women-led publishing houses' were forceful cornerstones in print-based enunciations of feminist activism and agency (Nijsten, 2011, p.214). Late 20th century protest posters illuminate how feminists mobilised against masculine representations of 'the female image' (See Fig 1.6). Pictured left, is a design produced by activists advocating: 'The female image presented by the sexist media will be smashed by us the women.' Nowadays, feminists attest to experiencing empowerment through

the renewed sense of creative license Instagram grants them over the storying of their bodies. A perspective, pictured right in Figure 1.6, where a meme proclaims: 'Our feeds, Our bodies.'

Studies suggest that when women are exposed to increased body diversity via Instagram, their sense of 'body satisfaction and appreciation' is improved (Cohen, et al., 2019b; Tiggemann, et al., 2020, p.129). However, women do not simply look at pictures to achieve real-life gains, they make them too. Women are active broadcasters, as well as receivers, of digital ideas. An imbalance manifests when women are chiefly viewed as audience members because their cognisant status as curators and performers of visual political agency goes under the radar (Caldeira, et al., 2018b). Aligned with Beaumont's (2013, pp.2-3) interpretation of political agency, my project recognises the need to assess how women's image-making makes a difference in women's lives. It is insufficient to purely observe that fat women are 'putting themselves out there' as part of self-love agendas. A discrepancy exists regarding whether performative statements against 'body terrorism' pose a structural challenge, as well as posing for the camera (Senyonga & Luna, 2021, p.268). Critical lines of enquiry are established with Instagrammers to assess if their self-portraiture is purposefully disseminated to resist gender stereotypes.

By commencing fieldwork on Instagram, I ensure that feminist scholarship is kept up to date through generating experiential and expressive evidence from the next generation of hashtag feminists. This contribution informs future understanding of social movement activity principled on visual identity reconstruction. Nossel (2016, p.103) implores social research to start acknowledging 'art's utility in activism' or risk eclipsing its 'ability to change our minds – inspiring us to take on different perspectives and to reimagine our worlds.' Within acceleratingly fatphobic societies, women who achieve a 'positive and undisturbed relationship with food' and their bodies are performing a rebellious act (Malson & Swann, 1999; Orbach, 2008; Tischner, 2013, p.21). So-called 'first-wave' suffragettes expressed political agency by withholding their appetites during hunger strikes, while fourth-wave feminists

seem to publicly indulge theirs (Nym Mayhall, 1995). Women are more likely to strive through dieting and exercising to meet culturally-enshrined heteronormative beauty codes (Bordo, 1993; Choi, 2003; Coffey, 2013). The taking up of space is a disobedience for women in the Western world, where female embodiment is 'supposed' to 'take up as little space as possible' (Hartley, 2001, p.61; Smailes, 2014). Existing literature suggests that to be positive and embody a fat female identity is a political act. The next section addresses how the struggle for fat female visibility has been compounded within feminist scholarship.

Feminism and Fat Female Visibility

The BPM is informed by earlier 'fat feminism' mobilised during 'de-colonising strategies' as 'part of American civil rights activism' (Cooper, 2016, p.157). Body positivity's origin story is particularly rooted in the 1960s Fat Acceptance movement, primarily established by black and Jewish fat women from America (Gordon, 2020, p.4; Yeboah, 2020a, pp.15-17). 'Fat positivity = body positivity' was isolated as a key social movement discursive frame during Darwin & Miller's (2020, p.8) study into online body positivity. In addition, during 2019, BPM Instagrammer, Victoria Welsby (@fierce.fatty) appeared in the documentary, *Who Are You Calling Fat?* (BBC, 2019). On camera, Welsby explicitly declared: 'Body positivity is a political movement that advocates for fat bodies' (Welsby quoted in *Who Are You Calling Fat?*, Episode 1, 2019, 10min).

The activism and agency of the fat female body has however been routinely denied, in its 'disgusting' majority positioning within a reparative cycle of weight loss and dieting (Vartanian, 2010). In mapping how 'gross bodies' are produced, Fahs (2017, p.85) observes that women undertake regulatory aesthetic labour to avoid an 'unfavourable fat identity.' A cultural compliance called for through body policing and fat-shaming 'feminine' expectations epitomised within this fictional passage from *Bridget Jones' Diary*:

> I feel ashamed and repulsive. I can actually feel the fat splurging out from my body. Never mind. Sometimes you have to sink to a nadir of

> toxic fat envelopment in order to emerge, phoenix-like, from the
> chemical wasteland as a purged and beautiful Michelle Pfeiffer figure.
> Tomorrow new Spartan health and beauty regime will begin
> (Fielding, 1997, p.18).

The 'thin true sexual body' is an aspirational ideal reflecting inequal gendered power relations that pressure women to exert their agency into aesthetic labour (Diamond, 1985, pp.120-21; Elias, et al., 2017, p.3). Contrary to populist depictions, fat female bodies do not only resist calorific content in passive obeyance to diet culture discourses because there is no universal fat female experience. Skeggs (1997, p.102) wisely states: 'to be completely feminine for most women would be almost impossible: it would be to be without agency, to be a sign of powerlessness. Femininity is uninhabitable as a complete and coherent category.' Women are complex social actors with ambitions and appetites that exceed an ascribed existence devoted to serving the male gaze through slim self-presentation. In her influential essay, *Visual Pleasure & Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey (1975) coined the term, 'male gaze' to connote how patriarchal ideologies can permeate image production by framing women as erotic passive objects, and heterosexual men as active consuming audiences.

This thesis raises evidence-based awareness that women also exercise 'political imaginations' as part of the 'fat community' to oppose proffered anti-fat 'feminine' social scripts of shame (Cooper, 2016, p.5). Within a fat acceptance context, fatness is not a clinical entity, or aligned with moral dysfunction, but a 'political identity' (Pendleton, 2020, p.9). During the 1970s, the London Women's Liberation Workshop produced the feminist newsletter, *Shrew*. In contrast to mainstream portrayals of weight-weary femininity, exemplified through the Bridget Jones protagonist, archive material from *Shrew* offers factual insight into anarchistic forms of fat feminine embodiment. These grassroots publications contain activist-authored articles, which not only illuminate rich lived experiences, but amplify the existence of an alternative fat feminist political subjectivity. One such non-fiction account is supplied in a protestor passage entitled, *Battle of the Bulge*:

It is against these prejudices and concepts of what is attractive that I must fight. One has the choice of either closing one's eyes and floating along with the current or of opening them wide and taking a stand. If only for reasons of self-respect, I have chosen the latter. I do not underestimate the enormity of trying to change society's values [.] It is hard enough to try and live according to my own ideas instead of theirs. But having this aim has given me strength and although daydreams of a new and skinny me are pleasant, they are by no means as exciting as the reality in which the plump me lives (*Shrew*, 1974, p.7).

The modern 'struggle' against fat has received considerable coverage in the context of women adhering to hegemonic beauty standards urging them to 'beat the bulge' (Stearns, 1997). Less has been said about women who choose to actively opt out of these punitive processes and protest, an imbalance my sociological study seeks to redress.

Following consultation with historical documents, I pinpoint the existence of a strained relationship between the fat female body's positioning in the field of feminist protest, and the field of feminist scholarship. Fat activist scholar, Charlotte Cooper (2010, np) coined the phraseology the 'holy trinity' to describe how academic study into feminism and fatness has over relied on the work of Bordo (1993), Chernin (1983) and Orbach (1978). Susie Orbach's 1978 publication, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* remains a mainstay of literature about fat bodies and the feminist movement. However, Orbach has been criticised for associating feminine fatness with being symptomatic of underlying 'disorder' (Bacon, 2019, p.298). A framing underlined in the original book title: *Fat is a Feminist Issue: A Self-Help Guide for Compulsive Eaters* (Cooper, 1998, p.87; Cooper, 2016, p.23; Higginbotham, 1997).

Gendered power relations are significantly misrepresented when fat female embodiment is presented as nothing more than a passive trauma response to patriarchal conditions (Erdman Farrell, 2011, p.148). A fundamental limitation of Orbach's work was its failure to comprehend the political potentiality of rogue fat female identities 'delighting' in performing fatness 'wrong' (Pausé, 2015, np). Those resisting sexist stereotypes imposed through social mechanisms, such as 'thin privilege' and 'size bigotry' (Boling,

2011, p.110). Instead, the only agentic use of fatness distinguished was its capacity as a preventative barrier to male sexual advances (Dickenson, 1983, p.40). There was no empowerment or positivity to be derived from the fat lived experience. Corpulence was monolithically conceptualised as a side effect of disease demanding remedial body and therapy work (Cooper 1998, p.88; Hester & Walters, 2016, p.25).
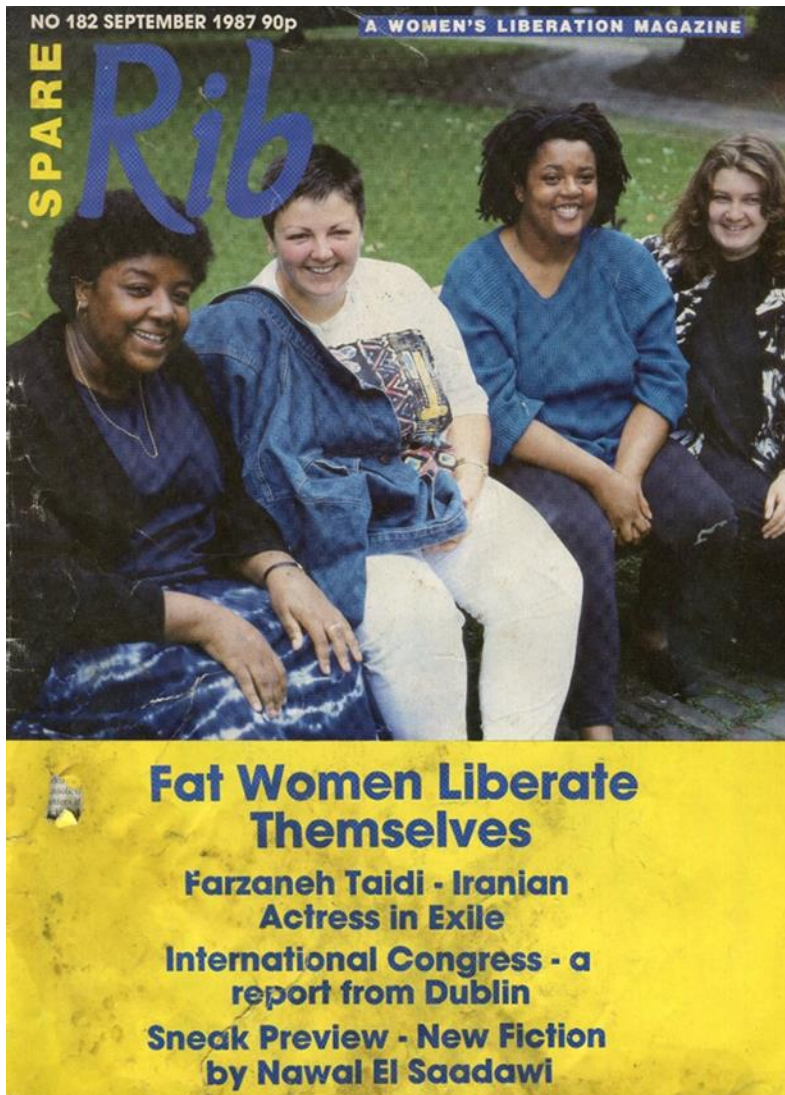
Figure 1.7

Fat liberation is a feminist issue, as featured on the front cover of a 1987 edition of feminist periodical, Spare Rib.

Source: Image taken by author of artefact from personal collection.

In comparison, the feature of fat liberation on the front cover of *Spare Rib* (1987) magazine situates fat-positive protest also as a 'feminist issue' (See Fig. 1.7). Inside the magazine, fat liberation feminists, Tina Jenkins and Heather Smith (1987, p.16) defied Orbach's need to purvey that 'our fat makes us automatically either physically or mentally ill.' My study into

feminist resistance resituates fat females as active social change agents rather than regurgitating old paradigms one-dimensionally positioning fat as 'an imprisoning social role' (Fumento, 1997, p.175). It challenges this prejudicial handling of fat and responds to calls from Hartley (2010, p.245) to 'make room for the fat body in feminist scholarship.' Highlighting the 'intersectionality of fat oppression' is especially important because fat feminists are doubly discriminated through 'negative stereotypes,' while inhabiting a dual fat-feminist identity (Chrisler, 2012, p.608).

Pausé & Grey (2018, np) argue 'fat women protesting is not new.' There is evidence to suggest resistance against imposed weight management body narratives, whereby women occupy social positions other than these repetitive anti-fat victim typologies (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). A 'fat-lash' that feminist theorists forgot is extending into networked spaces and gaining momentum. In fact, so much so, that blogging communities have become re-named 'the fat-o-sphere' (Harding & Kirby, 2009; Meleo-Erwin, 2011). The fat-o-sphere has been recognised as 'the main form of response' for activists engaged in the subversion of weight stigma and resistance against fatphobic discourse (Casadó-Marín & Gracia-Arnaiz, 2020, p.53).

Figure 1.8

Female BPM Instagrammers refuse to associate fat femininity with failure.

Source: Gillian McCollum (2020)

Printed with written permission.

New media is introducing new ways for women to 'feel' in 'norm-exceeding' bodies (Hynnä & Kyrölä, 2019, np). In later work, Orbach (2019, p.xii) herself conceded that social media is rewriting the terms of engagement regarding 'what it means to be seen and heard' leading to new forms of bodily 'display and identity.' My focal research topic, the BPM, provide an active example to explore how a predominantly female virtual network are countering fat oppression. For example, Figure 1.8 features Instagrammer, Gillian McCollum (@gillianmccollum), in which a selfie functions as a form of resistance against body-policing feminine beauty ideals positioning thinness as an aspirational benchmark.

For decades, feminist protest has urged women to 'take up space' in patriarchal societies ideologically seeking to 'shrink' their size and self-esteem (Diamond, 1985; Henley, 1977, pp.36-38). Feminist scholarship has generally failed to document the mobilisation strategies deployed to radically reclaim feminine fatness (Stokes, 2013, p.50). Fat female identities are disempowered when situated almost exclusively within victimhood dialogues, which frame corpulence as a social ill requiring containment, discipline and regulation (Lupton, 2018). Fat feminist activist, Vivian Mayer suggested that fear emotionally averted some fellow feminists from incorporating the cause of fat women's liberation. Mayer (1983, p.3) recounts from frontline resistance: 'In gatherings of the highest revolutionary spirit, you will see right-on feminists drinking cans of diet soda to avoid being fat.'

Nonetheless, female fatness is not only feared (Dalley & Buunk, 2009). I forgo the tendency towards pathologising (Orbach, 1978) to acknowledge how fat is positively performed to disrupt the established social order, a point only emphasised during Morris' (2019) interviews with fat activists. Interviewees reported experiencing empowerment when 'speaking fat' as part of collectives seeking to subvert fat-shaming stereotypes (Morris, 2019, p.170).

Figure 1.9

An anti-diet culture illustration from second-wave feminist discussion paper, Catcall promoting body diversity.

Source: Temple-Smith (1978, p.20)

Courtesy of The Feminist Library

Fat women's liberation has been a fundamental, yet academically overlooked, concern across feminist cycles of protest (Cooper, 2016, pp.103-104). For example, Figure 1.9 includes activist artwork from *Catcall*, a second-wave feminist discussion paper. This protest media reflects how the inhabitancy of fat-positive performative subjectivities is an overlooked facet of women's liberation mobilisations. My work aids amendment of this disconnect between a feminist struggle for fat visibility, and coverage received in feminist literature. An act of interventionist scholarship is made by revalidating the position of fat female feminists. Serafine (2018) investigated how during 1970s mobilisations, the secondary axis of fat female oppression remained a core component of feminist consciousness-raising. A point accentuated by the existence of sub-movements within second-wave Western feminism, such as Feminist Fat Activists (F.A.T). In addition, Ellison (2020) has highlighted the occurrence of fat feminist activism in Canada, exemplified through all-female political performance troops such as Pretty Porky and Pissed Off (PPPO) (Johnston & Taylor, 2008).

Likewise, Erdman Farrell (2016, p.1) suggests that American second-wave feminists reclaimed fatness as a symbol of 'natural beauty' and 'pleasure' through shows of subversive embodiment. Between the years of 1973 – 1977, The Fat Underground framed their lived 'oppression as fat women as being inherent to sexism' (Dean & Buss, 1979, np). Figure 1.10 features political buttons belonging to activist, Vivian Mayer, clearly aligning her fat and feminist political identities. A literature review revealed the presence of significant overlap in movement messages between current BPM connective action and previous waves of women's fat liberation collective action. A leading Fat Underground protest slogan was, 'Dieting is the cure for the disease that doesn't exist' (Saguy, 2013, p.50). While other movement mantras consisted of, 'Doctors are the enemy' and 'Weight loss is genocide' (Rasmussen, 2019, p.139). Founding members, Judy Freespirit and Vivian Mayer also co-authored, *The Fat Liberation Manifesto* in 1973. This charter demanded equal rights for fat people and singled out 'special enemies' in the 'reducing industries' (Freespirit & Aldebaran, 1979, p.18).

Figure 1.10

Political buttons belonging to fat feminist activist, Vivian Mayer

Fat Power (1974) Ref: APC button 033 & Fat Liberation Movement Button (1981)

Source: The Vivian Mayer Collection, The University of Connecticut

Similarly, today, #BodyPositive social media activity centres on the dismantlement of diet culture. The BPM largely refute slimming schemes as sources of empowerment and self-fulfilment, a no-diet-talk rule reflected in their rallying cry, Riots not diets. A phraseology that has been traced back to the 1990s, as part of third-wave feminist Riot Grrrl protest cultures (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p.78; Quinn, 2020, p.192). Figure 1.11 pictures issues of *Figure 8* zine, a title that made 'strong arguments against sizeism' (Freedman, 2009, p.54). These DIY artefacts position the promotion of shame-free fat embodiment and the 'fight for fat rights' as unrelenting feminist concerns. Body imagery is used to communicate a critical counterculture by flaunting the fat female form. Moreover, BPM rhetoric is echoed in accompanying by-lines advocating, 'Chub Love!' and 'Refuse to feel shame about your body!'
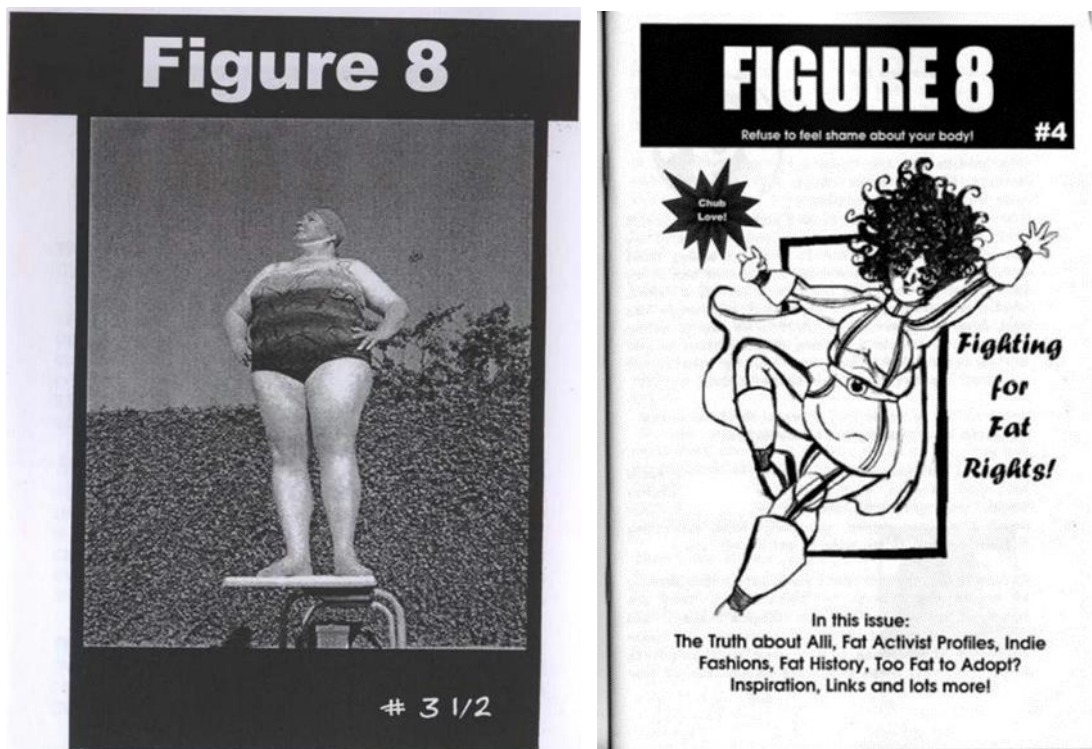
Figure 1.11

Editions 3½ & 4 of Figure 8 zine showing how DIY media has historically been maximised to spread information about anarchistic fat feminist subjectivities.

Source: Krissy Durden (2006)
        Printed with written permission.

Following engagement with archive protest materials, historic fat feminist movement slogans appear to share significant crossover in social change aspirations and campaign sentiment with the BPM. This poses the research question whether the BPM organise to 'protest' these common concerns in continuation of the 'feminist' activist arc. Unlike the Fat Underground before them, due to the BPM's fluid networked construction, there is an absence of a collaboratively-subscribed charter or shared values statement. Therefore, it is difficult to reliably distinguish a cohesive vision, or collective goals. This is where the justification for my research lies. Informed by SMT and SNT, a framework of social movement conventions is applied to a sample from the BPM network with a view to engage with its collective political conscience.

Currently, existing literature only contains primary protestor data from hashtaggers who are in the privileged position to leverage publishing deals. These texts have been colloquially referred to as 'fat girl memoirs.' However, the generalisability of the standpoints supplied is limited. They are authored by a select elite who occupy a social media influencer status due to amassing substantial follower bases. In one such publication, *Body Positive Power*, Crabbe (2017, p.40) notes: 'If I were a body positive superhero saving people from self-loathing then diet culture would be my evil nemesis.' There are striking parallels observable here between second-wave 'fat power' and fourth-wave 'body positive power.'

By adopting a subject-centred approach to data collection, this research captures missing broader #BodyPositive hashtagger attitudes. An original contribution to knowledge is made by engaging with BPM members - regardless of social stature - to discern if fat is an 'Instagram Feminist' issue, or do Instagrammers simply smile for the camera? In the absence of a formal social movement subscription structure or physical headquarters, qualitative outreach can denote BPM levels of feminist self-ascription, plus identify shared areas of social change agitation. This thesis supplies evidence-based input to critical debates regarding the future direction of feminist activism. Fat positivity reflects just one facet of the BPM. However, this section served to provide an explanatory justification for why it has

developed into a key research concern. It is noted that forms of 'fat resistance' go unrecognised as 'activism' within 'traditional activist praxis' (Stewart & Breeden, 2021, pp.226-227). In centring the testimonies of content creators, this inclusive approach ensures fat feminist protest positions will not be omitted, as in previous 'waves,' but garner visibility as part of fourth-wave academic explorations. The penultimate section details the organisation of my thesis by providing a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of forthcoming content.

Outline of Chapters

This research is a study into feminist resistance. It is theoretically guided throughout by SMT and feminist frameworks, which act as conceptual devices. The next two chapters appraise existing literature from each of these respective disciplines to situate my work within established knowledge. Chapter Two starts by assessing how protest output has been classified within the schools of SMT and SNT. It illustrates the persistent challenges and complexities associated with conceptualising feminist activity. Significant contestation exists regarding a common goal, plus women's liberation activity has historically evaded conventions, such as appointing a formal leader.

Beaumont, et al., (2020, p.3) suggest that SMT helps conceptualise collective action. This is in order that 'social movement' activity can be separated from that of 'single issue, special interest, lobby groups' (Beaumont, et al., 2020, p.3). The chapter sets out the conceptual frameworks useful to conducting investigatory work into unfolding forms of feminist connective action, often undertaken within informal private spaces. A means of measurement will be established to assess if emerging social media movement structures correlate with existing conceptualisations. In addition, Chapter Two explains the subsidiary role SNT plays in this analysis. It locates hashtag feminism at the forefront of current debate surrounding the political efficacy of so-called 'armchair activism' or 'slacktivism.'

The importance of my research derives from expanding academic debate to incorporate how activism and agency are expressed via Instagram's imaging tools. In response, Chapter Three serves to locate my contribution within a legacy of feminist scholarship dedicated to the critical analysis of female body imagery. The chapter opens by introducing the historic work of feminist social constructionist theorists, a critical perspective that can aid interpretation of contemporary embodied resistance and Instagram empowerment strategies. This evaluation of existing sources contextualises the 'feminine' body, as a site of confrontation and surveillance, within unremittent patriarchal structures.

Chapter Three imparts a valuable theoretical grounding to appreciate the prejudice encountered as part of fat embodiment, within gender inequal societies. Moreover, an intersectional model is applied to demonstrate that fat is not just a feminist issue, but a race one. Drawing on archive material, Chapter Three scrutinises the structural inequalities encountered by BWOC along the axes of weight, gender and racial identity. This descriptive account traces fat black female oppression from colonialism to current day concerns regarding co-optation and a lack of black visibility in the BPM.

Chapter Four outlines my methodological approach. This charts the process from piloting to design and development. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a reflective account detailing the rationale behind my decision to employ a dual data collection strategy, combining an online survey and participant observation study. In accordance with feminist research principles, these sections will explain choices made in the interests of maintaining qualitative capture of participant voice. Furthermore, Chapter Four outlines ethical considerations, provides a positionality statement and describes data analysis processes.

The subsequent chapters contain an analysis of my key findings. Chapter Five presents a participant profile statement in evaluation of who expresses activism and agency as part of the BPM. The creation of this profile is essential to comprehending engagement rates in hashtag feminism. A

leading research objective is vested in gathering this evidence base to test whether fourth-wave feminism's intersectional theoretical outlook translates into practice. This interest area was developed following claims there was a redundancy in pluralistic perspectives both within hashtag feminism, and the BPM.

Chapter Six considers how participants enact 'selfie-empowerment' via Instagram body exhibitionism. All sections prioritise presentation of qualitative statements from those actively participating in LYB discourses, commonly mobilised as part of fourth-wave feminism. Survey responses are analysed, in accordance with postfeminist critique, to pinpoint the presence of underlying social change incentives. A 'technology of self' is said to have surfaced that 'turns away from structural inequalities' and towards embodied self-work, expressed through an extroverted 'confidence culture' (Gill & Orgad, 2016, p.324). Chapter Six therefore focuses on uncovering whether political motivations reside behind the BPM's personal camerawork.

Chapter Seven concludes the presentation of my findings. It deliberates with what constitutes political activism and agency online in association with SMT frameworks. Opening sections analyse emerging collective attitudinal and behavioural traits, in conjunction with Melucci's (1989, p.29) defining social movement framework. Chapter Seven confirms that the BPM was found to maintain no substantial traditional offline protest presence. This represents a major finding. Nevertheless, rather than admonish these protest behaviours, with support from activist testimonies, Chapter Seven details the different typologies feminist engagement can take. Only a small amount of hashtaggers were found to engage in direct action, such as marches and rallies, but that is not to say that political consciousness was not being demonstrated.

The overlap between online and offline protest spheres also occupies a centrality to critical discussion. This prioritisation is motivated by urban occupation's essentialisation in SNT benchmarks (Castells, 2013) of what constitutes authentic 'activism.' Chapter Seven presents new evidence

relaying how for certain cross-sections of the BPM, activism and agency can never exceed the armchair. Rather than screen-based advocacy being dismissed as secondary slacktivism, survey data sheds new light on how the poverty stricken, disabled and geographically isolated position SNSs as key enablers to political agency through fostering digital inclusion.

Chapter Eight opens with a recap of my project's guiding objectives. Thereafter, focus is devoted to championing its key findings. It confirms there is considerable evidence to suggest that social media activity can be reliably conceptualised as 'social movement' activity. This signifies a noteworthy achievement because my research succeeds in shaking up entrenched ideas about how bodies and protest sites cooperate during activist claims-making. Qualitative accounts break new ground by conveying the benefits fat women experience from putting themselves on screen in subversive statements against sexist conventions. The chapter concludes by offering recommendations for future research.

Conclusion

Across this chapter I have conveyed how the expansive scope of female political activism and agency can be captured through the application of a feminist conceptual framework. Engagement with feminist theory disrupts closed definitions of traditional political engagement to encompass how micro sites of community action can make a difference in citizen's lives. Chapter One has set out how my work expands on this outlook by applying it to an online environment. SNSs were situated as critical informal spaces with the capacity for agentic identity reformation.

To paraphrase Takhar (2013, p.1), the opportunity exists for women on the internet to 'rock the stereotype' and present subjectivities that circumvent heteromale-coded beauty standards. Yet the body's status as an active instrument in protest cannot be assumed. Chapter One issued a statement of intent to deliver much needed evidence-based clarification in this regard. Opening sections explained the problematic relationship feminists have with

the camera as a perceived source of sexualisation. The chapter uncovered substantial ambiguity surrounding whether body selfies should be most accurately associated with self-objectification, or self-empowerment. In response, a detailed rationale was provided for initiating critical dialogue with Instagram content creators to assess what their output is attempting to achieve. This is in the interests of fulfilling my research aim to investigate how the body and Instagram collaborate as protest sites.

Chapter One introduced several essential theoretical concepts, including definitions of a 'fourth-wave' feminism characterised by its internet-based outlets. With the support of historical protest documents, a case was made for DIY media's ongoing centrality in reclaiming fat female bodies from masculine structures. A notorious past delineated by women making a fuss through making images was examined spanning zine culture to current onscreen mediums. An overview of the BPM's core principles and performative protest tropes was also provided. It was vital to contextualise my case study within fourth-wave feminism's computerised climate because my research objectives seek to understand how social media is impacting social movement formation.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that there is a lesser-known fat feminist protest presence, which is majorly overlooked in mainstream literary coverage of feminist resistance. Chapter One emphasises this project's refusal to airbrush the fat feminist protest subject out of future interpretations of activism and agency. Orbach (2011, p.387) lamented how women were 'losing bodies' to a media they feel 'outside of,' with SNSs merely offering the 'quasi-democratized [sic] possibility of having a voice.' Ten years later, my research goes one step further by committing women's voices to academic record and assessing if this possibility has been realised.

Chapter One underlined the vital contribution this research makes to feminist debate through documenting that women do not only 'lose' their bodies to media. From the outset, women were positioned as producers, as well as muses, exercising editorial control over the transmission of deviant

femininities. Fat women are shunned, stigmatised and policed by external agencies to take up less space. SNSs enable them to publicly violate societal expectations via shows of subversive self-display. Furthermore, the BPM behaviours explored across this chapter suggest that connective action is rapidly becoming a touchstone of contemporary activism. The critical matter of whether traditional offline action is being displaced by this online connective action will be examined in greater depth throughout Chapter Two.

With the support of SMT and SNT frameworks, the next chapter advances the discussion by focusing specifically on how social media interactions are challenging classical conceptualisations of 'social movement' activity. In the interests of meeting this objective, a structure of defining characteristics is developed from a comprehensive literature review. Moreover, ideas outlined above surrounding the future direction of activism, are contextualised within academic debates critiquing the political propensity of hashtivism.

Chapter 2: Social Media Movements

Introduction

Chapter One has outlined how digital behaviours, such as hashtagging, are purported to be part of so-called fourth-wave feminism. However, an empirical evidence base is required to substantiate whether personal social media profiles are 'political.' This chapter will provide an overview of the literature on social movement and social network theory. Here a conceptual framework to aid in the reading of political activism and agency is developed. It is claimed that political movements are now being articulated 'as social networks, rather than as institutions' making contemporary social movement activity more slippery to define (Hilton, et al., 2013, p.12). This chapter will establish the research problem and discuss the issues encountered when attempting to classify hashtag feminist activity as 'social movement' activity.

Ensuing sections introduce the social movement theory of Alberto Melucci, which occupies a central role in the analysis of BPM networked behaviours. Sasson-Levy & Rapoport (2003, p.379) implore social movement researchers to increase recognition of the 'potential of the protesting body as an agent of social and political change.' My research is steered by an overarching aim to conceptualise whether the body and Instagram can be understood as 'protest' sites. The choice to adopt Melucci's framework is made on the basis that he recognises how informal sites, with specific reference to the body, can become legitimised as politicised dimensions of existence. According to Melucci (1994, pp.101-102): 'these are precisely the areas [the body] where individuals and groups lay claim to their autonomy, where they conduct their search for identity… and construct the meaning of what they are and what they do.' Through Melucci's theoretical orientation, it is possible to appraise political expression removed from classical notions, which can overemphasise centralised mechanisms of formal democratic change.

Social Movements and Women's Bodies: An Uneasy Relationship

SMT has understood 'human agency' to form a fundamental part of harnessing changing models of resource mobilisation and political processes to collectively rally against oppressors (Morris, 2000, p. 445). Four years ago, body positive bloggers were conceptualised as 'activists' on the grounds that women were 'taking back their size,' in opposition to fat shaming societal forces, and communicating radical performances to fellow users (Boyles, 2017, p.2). This chapter notes the need to progress this critical dialogue, in accordance with newer media, and assess if these feminist performatively political behaviours have transferred to Instagram. The frameworks detailed act as a guide to direct analysis of the BPM's sporadic and geographically dispersed hashtag interactions, with a view to interpret Instagram's potential as an emerging 'protest' site.

Traditionally, social movements were seen to support collective actor interests orientated in lobbying and accessing a 'stable structure of political bargaining' (Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982; Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p.286). In the past, researchers assumed collective 'popular demands' were channelled through 'public agitation' to create a 'ruckus' and capture the attention of prevailing political elites and state institutions (Imhonopi, et al., 2013, p.76). In stark contrast, the BPM actors are using networked media to achieve fat-positive body visibility; a visibility against what Orbach (2019, p.63) described as 'false bodies,' a term used to depict narrow stereotypical ideals complicit in the maintenance of an oppressively heteronormative and ableist status quo.

Schiebinger (2000, p.1) argues 'nineteenth-century gentlemen scholars finely turned out in sombre suits and vests complete with pocket watches' deemed it 'improper' to have female students, let alone discuss the female body politic. Subsequently, the female body was omitted from academic scrutiny on male accounts of it being 'too vulgar, trivial or risqué to merit serious scholarly attention' (Schiebinger, 2000, p.1). In developing new social movement (NSM) theory, Melucci (1980, pp.219-220) progressively

embraced the body and sexuality as 'areas of collective resistance' crucial to 'integrative and manipulative efforts' against a 'system of domination.' We can see this in feminist activism which has a history of displaying the 'non-mainstream' and 'grotesque' female body to publicly reclaim it through visual 'identity subversion' (Pitts, 1998, p.67). If the fat female body is considered a site of performance, it can also be recognised as an expression of political 'uprising' and 'revolution' (Greenall, 2020, np). As Forte (1988, p.217) explains: 'all women's performances are derived from the relationship of women to the dominant system of representation, situating them within a feminist critique.' Feminist scholarship has noted how fat bodies have become 'a point of increasing political interest and debate' due to their positioning within fat-shaming narratives labelling them as 'irresponsible' (Knox, 2019, np). I argue that, due to technological innovation, these performative feminist claims appear to have transitioned towards virtual forms of activist expression.

Feminist thinkers exercise criticality towards dominant discourses prioritising offline protest as 'real' activism. When 'traditional, masculinist, adult-centred' protest norms are upheld in this way, it is to the exclusion of young women's preferred digital modalities (Jackson, 2018, p.44). Much attention is subsequently dedicated to how embodied agency is performed via the 'male default' of street protest. A deep-seated favouritism towards urban 'public gatherings' means women's opportunities for body reclamation are generally purveyed through Prochoice rallies against the state (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p.178). I contend that the screen, as opposed to the street, is rapidly becoming the main stage for social movement activity. Butler & Athanasiou (2013, p.176) observe that collective political action demands activists engage in a 'plural performativity.' This term refers to group possession of a conjoined passion and is more outwardly comprehensible when physical bodies march in unison, as part of an organised crowd with a tangible mission statement. However, my work's importance derives from its goal to understand if a hashtag organises networked embodied political performativity in the same way.

Historically, women have been excluded from the masculine domain of public protest. Their involvement poses a challenge to patriarchal understandings of 'appropriate' and 'respectable' female comportment (Takhar, 2013, p.56). Consequently, on occasions when women take to the streets in their masses, these public shows of feminine solidarity are swiftly shutdown. Misogynist power relations have timelessly hampered female participation in public life by asserting linguistic, or coercive, control to reinforce rigid gender roles. A tendency evidenced in the summer of 1643, when 5,000-6,000 Peace Women marched on Westminster wearing white ribbons to present a petition to parliament, as part of anti-civil war protest. *The Kingdom's Weekly Intelligencer* newspaper reported the activists were: 'whores, bawds, oyster-women, kitchen-stuff women, beggar women and the very scum of the suburbs, besides a number of Irish women' (quoted in Read, 2015, p.6).

In other cases, institutional gender discrimination towards female protestors escalated from written character assassinations to physical assault. As far back as first-wave feminism, on what became known as Black Friday (18th November 1910), suffragettes were subjected to hours of police brutality. Protestors were charged down by officers on horseback and their limbs twisted (van Wingerden, 1999, p.123). Many female activists suffered serious injuries, in some cases, later leading to death (Hill, 2018, p.158). Given this background of systemic violence levied at women attempting to speak out in traditional public protest spaces, feminist theorisations acknowledge that women frequently seek out alternative safe spaces to achieve political empowerment.

Kerrow & Mordan (2021) emphasise that female activism and non-violent direct action (NVDA) strategies are inextricably linked. From the late 19th century Irish Ladies' Land League revolt to late 20th century Greenham Peace Camp protest, women 'luminaries' have deployed NVDA only to be met with police arrest, military torment, and the denial of toilet facilities and electricity (Chester, 2021; Kerrow & Mordan, 2021, pp.11-12). These manipulative processes are termed 'communicative injustice' orchestrated by sexist societies that revere 'silence' as the 'idealised mode of communication

for women' (Boyce Kay, 2020, p.8). Jilly Boyce Kay (2020, p.71) explores how female political agency is stunted under male-contrived gendered expectations of 'demure' feminine behaviour. Women are expected to be submissive; this gendered expectation is operationalised through cultural condemnation of their chosen communicative justice solutions (Boyce Kay, 2020, p.33). Feminist theorists call upon researchers to adopt a broadened notion of feminine agency, which acknowledges SNS usage for how it 'enables access to conversations, ideas and stories that might otherwise be ignored' (Guillard, 2016, p.610).

Contrary to male-centred political ideals, hashtag feminism has generated great gains for women and is impacting on the constitution of contemporary social movements. For instance, during 2012, Lucy-Anne Holmes launched her #NoMorePageThree campaign. The female body became part of a 'rate and rank culture' in the 1970s when *The Sun* newspaper integrated softcore pornography into their editorial output (Bingham, 2009, p.223; Moseley, 2019, p.17). 'Page Three' centred on the daily publication of topless female portraiture. Holmes (2015, p.9) used web tools to initiate a countercultural response: 'I started an online petition. That online petition turned into a campaign. The campaign became a movement.' This instance of connective action resulted in the sexist staple being removed from circulation in January 2015 after 45 years. A victorious Holmes (2015, p.23) declared: 'The good news is, it's never been easier. Thanks to Tim Berners-Lee and his unbelievably kind gift of the internet, we now have at our fingertips the means to form communities and effect change.'

It is argued that social movement structures are being swept up in a trend towards the 'privatization [sic] of politics' where notions of political participation are becoming increasingly orientated in unpaid and decentred activity (Hilton, et al., 2013, p.11). This hardly signifies a new phenomenon for female activists. Obstructive gendered power relations have fostered feminised forms of citizenship commonly enacted behind closed doors and within grassroots community spaces (Beaumont, 2000). In patriarchal

society, Nash (1975, p.261) defines 'resistance' as an intrinsic part of lived female experience:

> Resistance is a peculiarly feminine form of protest because in the very act of self-definition, women must resist a culturally imposed role that denies their sense of being… Lacking political power, their major show of resistance is to withdraw their labor [sic], their *bodies*.

By populating Instagram with self-portraiture, designed to subvert sexist stereotyping, body positive women are not only withdrawing their bodies from imposed patriarchal scripts, but masculine political platform preferences. It was of paramount importance to select a progressive social movement perspective seeking to challenge, rather than perpetuate, prescriptive patriarchal versions of 'protest.'

Melucci's analysis is adopted because it breaks down culturally engrained gendered barriers between public and private protest spaces. NSM theory is revolutionary in circumventing the 'linear model of the political universe,' to note that social change can be affected via 'deviant' noninstitutional methods, entities of unrest not solely devoted to pressuring parliaments about economic and security issues (Offe, 1985, p.857). Melucci's work particularly aligns with feminist thinkers' acknowledgement that political agency is not context-specific and instead orientated in one's ability to act as an autonomous social actor anywhere.

Furthermore, this chapter also details how my analysis is supported by SNT. The chapter culminates in a focus on Manuel Castells (1996), the theorist responsible for coining the phrase, the 'network society' because his work prompts critical debate regarding the classification of 'protest' in our screen societies. Though largely technologically deterministic in standpoint, Castells' framework calls into question the viability of conceptualising standalone social network activity as 'real' social movement activity. The following section highlights some of the key challenges hashtagging and online activity pose to existing understanding.

Hashtag Feminism

The #BodyPositive hashtag has currently been included in 17,092,109 public Instagram posts. The hashtag presents a mass-subscribed, but fluid and ephemeral, carrier of current feminist activism. Its significant uptake as a mode of mobilisation has since led to the common coinage of the phraseology, 'hashtag feminism' (Chen et al., 2018; Dixon, 2014; Khoja-Moolji, 2015). This is a socio-technical development that this project acknowledges in selection of Instagram as the focal site of study. By looking at female hashtivist networks, the BPM offers a case study through which classical SMT notions of traditional 'protest' can be interrogated through a critical feminist lens.

Our screen societies have introduced a communications shift in how political activism and agency are expressed. Technologically deterministic accounts observe how 'the ability is now in all our hands… to build community or build up movements' (Timms & Heimans, 2018, p.1). My work engages in a responsive academic endeavour by recognising that social movement modes of action are becoming increasingly screen-based, often derived from hashtags. The start of a social movement can be signalled via the clatter of a keyboard, as opposed to a rallying cry. Early social movement theorists, Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) set out a series of formalised social movement stages. This life cycle recognises that activist protest trajectories comprise from emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation and decline.

Although the initial 'emergence' stage resonates with the digital realm, in that it is principled on gathering public discontent articulated towards an existing world order, in later stages, a disconnect starts to develop. Tufekci (2014, p.1) termed connective action 'horizontalist' and 'leaderless' in its networked architecture. As life cycle stages advance, emphasis becomes concentrated on the idea that figureheads will inevitably surface, a classification proving unfit for the purpose of analysing the leaderless and flattened communication hierarchies of hashtag movements (Castells, 2015, pp.252-256). This suggestion that social media movements do not fit established models is

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supported by existing literature.

According to Milan (2015, p.887), the internet has introduced a form of distanced 'cloud protesting' rendering traditional SMT notions redundant. Milan (2015, p.887) counters that a contemporary 'politics of visibility,' characterised by a focus on individualist 'subjective' and 'private experience,' is mobilised. Cloud protesting is said to build a collective unit through individual expressions, such as Instagram user profiles, which snowball into a driving display of collective identity. The evolution of hashtag feminism disrupts the longstanding concept of the social movement life cycle. It is argued that youth protest styles, founded on autobiographical output, mean digital media is responsible for introducing rejuvenated movement structures (Quakernack, 2018). Therefore, my research acknowledges the need to test these claims by investigating if BPM Instagram activity complies with SMT conventions. It is essential to empirically cross correlate so-called fourth-wave feminist traits with recognised frameworks to gauge shifting activist identities and the future direction of protest experience.

Through SNSs, a crowd can figuratively gather once a topic 'goes viral' in a string of interlinked linguistic interaction online. Due to the global reach and usership of networked social movements (Mendes, et al., 2018), it is the advent of social media that is compelling academic study to think about 'activism' and 'agency' in different ways. Kasana (2014, p.237) has described social media as a 'vital platform for social justice gains.' For example, over 1.7 million silence breakers against sexual harassment tweeted the #MeToo hashtag within 10 days, to break the taboo over sexual violence against women inflicted by men in positions of privilege and power (Gieseler, 2019, p.2). Once more, the body was centralised as a site of abuse and violation in the hashtivism organised by predominantly female survivors. The #MeToo hashtag movement however led the boundaries between online-offline activism to become blurred when perpetrator, Harvey Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison for sex crimes during March 2020 (Ransom, 2020).

Social actors take to social media applications to voice collective dissent, discursively occupying online space, in the same way offline space was occupied by demonstrations decades before. In 2017, a Youth Trends Report surveyed 2,000 16-24-year-olds and revealed that only 4% declared they join in outdoor demonstrations (Legraien, 2017). In comparison, an astonishing 74% agreed that online activism is 'as important' as traditional activism (Legraien, 2017). Likewise, black disabled advocate, Britney Wilson (2020, p.207) characterises a 'true millennial fashion' by its dependence on SNSs, blogging and Change.org petitioning to achieve social change.

Moreover, this is a development that appears to have extended to older demographics harnessing Mumsnet as a platform to express 'practical, everyday feminism, due to its ability to digitally enable connection between activists and policymakers' (Pedersen, 2020a, np). In conceptualising Mumsnetters, Pedersen (2020b, p.10) declares: 'I am using politics with a small p here to widen the discussion beyond party politics.' My study is important in its mission to analyse the extent to which activism and agency are articulated via networked advocacy.

Wilkinson (1971, p.12) asserts that SMT arose as a 'mechanistic' means of explaining emerging group tendencies translating action towards a cause. However, schools of SMT are not stationary entities, working definitions continue to be recalibrated, in accordance with the fluid protest habits gaining traction. Mische & White (1998, p.703) define 'social networks' as:

> sets of actors jointly positioned in relation to a given array of ties (for example, friendship advice, co-work, church membership, political alliance, business transactions, information exchange and so on). Each type of tie is accompanied by its own set of stories (along with associated discursive signals) that are held in play over longer or shorter periods of time.

The body positive Instagram community is bonded – at least figuratively by the 'tie' of a hashtag - through information exchange on SNSs. By amassing a large dataset of Instagrammer testimonies, my research measures if a distinct 'set of stories' can be consistently observed across the hashtag network.

Network theorist, Louise Ryan (2020, p.3) similarly initiated a qualitative enquiry to establish how 'network stories,' unique to the domain in which intercommunication takes place, are co-constructed. Zavattaro (2020) studied Instagram BPM accounts to ascertain the way the application is utilised to generate social change in relation to attitudes towards fatness. Findings suggested that SNSs have become 'primary tools people use to shape and change discourse that frames fat bodies as lesser members of society or a problem to be controlled' (Zavattaro, 2020, np). Unfortunately, the study only focused on a small selection of individualist BPM Instagram profiles, plus analytic overemphasis was granted to those with high follower counts. By broadening the focus to incorporate everyday people's accounts, applied to a large sample, my findings provide a more generalised idea of the #BodyPositive network's widespread 'set of stories.'

In doing so, I respond directly to recommendations made by academics such as Darwin & Miller (2020) who investigated BPM blogging networks. Their study suggested it would be 'productive' to 'survey a general audience about their understanding of the movement, whether and why they identify with the movement' (Darwin & Miller, 2020, p.6). Equally, Otis (2020) recently recognised the capability of Instagram tools to disrupt fat's binarisation with health, but solely in relation to high profile BPM influencer, Tess Holliday, and not in consort with the wider network. I intend to redress this discrepency in knowledge through the application of SMT to test if hashtagging corresponds with 'movement' membership.

In the information age, Melucci (1996, p.44) defines 'collective identity' as: 'an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place.' Based on hashtag use alone, the BPM appears to be an interactive 'movement' compromised from millions. However, Mische & White (1998) and Melucci's (1996) definitions serve to highlight the valuable difference between a social network and a social movement. BPM digital behaviours are ordered into a social network by the hashtag, yet collective action needs

to surpass matching hashtag usage alone to be conceptualised as 'social movement' membership.

Classification as such is dependent on the accumulation of evidence to suggest the presence of a shared outlook to supplement the sharing of a hashtag. For instance, Della Porta & Diani (2006, p.20) stipulate that social movements are 'involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; [and] share a distinct collective identity.' Critical components, directed at the diet industry, are present in user-generated BPM content (See Fig 2.1). Nevertheless, as Christiansen (2009, p.2) reiterates, social movements are not merely a 'mass fad or trend, which are unorganized [sic], fleeting and without goals.'
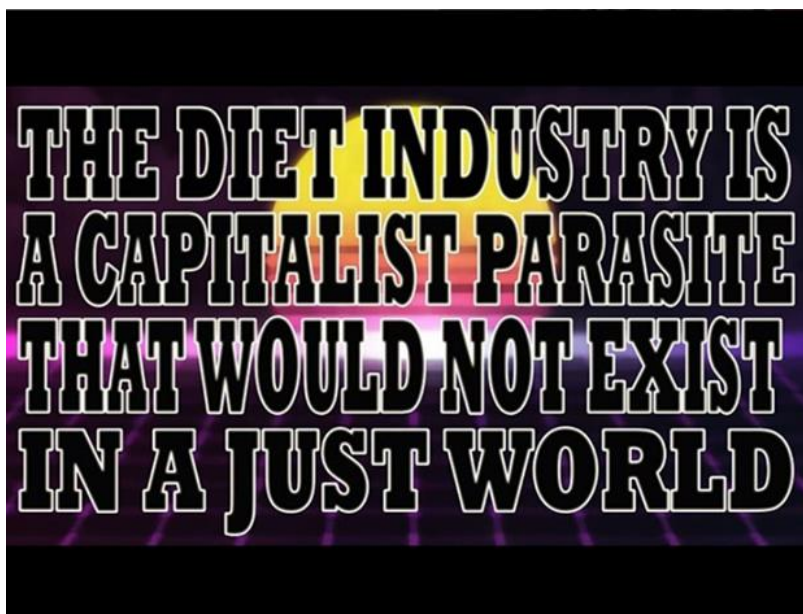
Figure 2.1

An Instagram body positive meme, explicitly revolting against the diet industry.

Source: artists_ali (2020)

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During research into Turkish digital feminist activism, Şener (2021, p.5) observed how 'the micro-interactions of women on the Internet have paved the way for the formation of feminist subjects.' My research aims to analyse whether this potentiality is being meaningfully collectively exploited on Instagram. No empirical evidence base currently exists to reliably document if likeminded structures of feeling, targeting an identified oppressor, are collectively held within #BodyPositive network structures. Although Melucci (1980, p.220) validates the body's status as an arena for political transformation, he also necessitates that solidarity remains a key feature of

NSMs. Bodies cannot simply feature, they must be instrumental to 'direct participation' in 'the rejection of representation' (Melucci, 1980, p.220). In recognition, I delve beyond surface-based discursive exchanges, to scrutinise if hashtagging is underpinned by a purposive collective mindset. By doing so, my project explores if social network activity can be soundly classified as 'social movement' activity.

Fourth-wave feminism is premised on intersectional principles, with inclusive body-focused agendas, that are 'digitally driven' (Wiggins & Anderson, 2019, p.32). In contrast, the sisterhood has historically stood accused of enforcing a white middle-class feminist outlook to speak for all women, an essentialisation exercised at the expense of black and working-class women's perspectives (Stevenson, 2019, p.129). Contemporary feminist texts suggest (Cheung, 2020, p.5) that with 'each generation' feminism is evolving to address 'a more diverse array of needs' and 'correct the problematic non-inclusive mistakes of previous generations.' Through engaging in academic dialogue with those hashtaggers, currently immersed in using 'fourth-wave' feminist tools, I will discern if evidence of a cohesive protest logic is achieved within scattered digital networks.

As covered in Chapter One, consciousness-raising was a prevalent protest feature of second-wave feminism. Hashtagging is said to signify the modern-day consciousness-raising because it subscribes to a continuum of feminist 'narrative politics' (Serisier, 2020, p.210). This relationship between hashtagging and advancement of the women's liberation protest lineage is documented by feminist scholars:

> The "sisterhood" does not just involve the 1970s, but also prefigures the fourth wave. The activities of the #MeToo collective basically involves a reformulation of the concept of sisterhood, as women across the globe share experiences of abuse or harassment suffered in their lives. Through the #MeToo movement, women become sisters one more time (Pagnoni Berns, et al., 2019, p.81).

Networked showcases of consciousness-raising and computerised campaigning have resulted in palpable in-real-life (IRL) social justice interventions. During 2021 the website, Everyone's Invited was set up to

record stories of sexual harassment following the Sarah Everard tragedy. This virtual storying catalysed offline action, such as staged student walkouts, after many young women used the platform to raise awareness of rape culture in British schools (Strick, 2021). dana boyd (2010, p.39) coined the phraseology, 'networked publics' to depict how these digital collective behaviours connote that crowds not only coalesce around IRL communities, but URL ones too. My study is informed by these forward-thinking standpoints emerging within SMT.

Serafinelli (2018, p.8) positions Instagram as the foundation of a 'new mobile visualities aesthetic' for fat liberation. Nevertheless, how this innovative platform is utilised within user-generated content for protest purposes has received less coverage, with noted exceptions (Caldeira, et. al, 2018a; Olszanowski, 2014; Retallack, et al., 2016). This oversight means that active instances of hashtag feminism are currently being omitted from the scope of studies. The Instagram application represents one of the youngest SNSs, as it was initially launched in 2010. In comparison, Mark Zuckerberg's sister-site[3], Facebook was created in 2004 followed by Twitter in 2006. Subsequently, these more established applications have received considerable coverage regarding their political potential as 'protest sites' (Kavada, 2012; Losh, 2014; Zimmerman, 2017), leaving Instagram often overlooked. I argue there is a need to know more about platforms being actively implemented by substantial female networks in social change campaigning.

Newly developed literature proposing that Instagram-specific activity can carry underlying political motivations was encountered during the literature review. Boling (2020, p.966) recently positioned Instagram as a digital enabler to offline activism, for example, a 'Twitter storm' followed attempts from a male peer to 'silence' US senator, Liz Warren by interupting her mid-speech (Brooks, 2019, p.114). However, Boling (2020) expanded the breadth of her research to incorporate Instagram hashtag responses. A

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[3] Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg purchased Instagram in 2012.

protest study was conducted into the subsequent #ShePersisted hashtag movement. Boling (2020) summarised that Instagram fostered inclusion online, achieved through the app's centrality to translating digitally distanced political exchanges into urban occupation. Her work refreshingly propositioned Instagram as critical to community-building, in achieving connectivity between isolated individuals, who then transitioned 'the conversation from their computer screens to the streets' (Boling, 2020, p.966).

Feminist scholars, such as Dixon (2014, p.36), highlight how 'women's stories are gendered and telling their stories in a male cultured society has silenced their voices.' By centring expressions from user-generated platforms, I recognise the potential of networked publishing to overcome prohibitive patriarchial structures. A renewed sense of narrative ownership is seen to be an outcome of a communications switch from a one-to-many to a many-to-many dynamic (Caldeira et al., 2017, p.324; Gillmor, 2004). Existing feminist literature notes that culture can provide a 'weapon' for activists when homemade output functions as a carrier for feminist critique (Rentschler, 2019, np). On more established SNSs, feminists have utilised hashtags to circulate images posing a visual affront to sexist ideologies with critical guile and humour (Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018; Rentschler & Thrift, 2015; Ringrose & Lawrence, 2018). This thesis is guided by an aim to understand if Instagram photographic distribution is proof of fat fourth-wave feminists making waves, or evidence that women are still being 'bound by the body' as part of politically deficient 'girl power' dialogues (Gonick, et al., 2009, p.2). It addresses an impasse in current debate, wherein hashtag feminism is conceived as both a 'liberatory force,' and associated with 'empty and self-congratulatory display[s] of righteousness' (Horeck, 2014, p.1106).

Tombleson & Wolf (2017, p.15) define 'hashtag activism' as an 'act of fighting for or supporting a cause with the use of hashtags as a primary channel to raise awareness of an issue and encourage debate via social media.' The 'participatory culture' introduced by SNSs has meant the hashtag has evolved to become a cornerstone of social change campaigning

(Tombleson & Wolf, 2017, p.15). Claims-making is remodifying in format; a raised fist of defiance can be articulated via an emoji, plus a petition, virtually signed. I respond to suggestions raised in the literature that the hashtag presents the contemporary equivalent of the protest placard in our digitally lived times. For example, Chen, et al. (2018, p.212) have drawn attention to how the hashtag is a tool, crucial to the expression of female political empowerment:

> Hashtags are only a tool, much like blogging or gathering in rallies or handing out leaflets. What brings women power is not the hashtag, which is merely an affordance of the media platform; it is the voice and the agency in which women offer that voice.

As expressed here, the hashtag is however just that, a tool used to transport a message. The presence of political agency can therefore only be located with the social actor, not social tagging. It is unreliable to superficially infer that a hashtag shares the same underlying meaning, unilaterally interpreted, across millions of isolated Instagrammers. Likewise, the existence of high engagement rates in women peer networks does not automatically mean interactions are performed with feminist purpose. SNSs have become mass-subscribed virtual spaces, yet their status as a network configured soapbox for the disenchanted cannot be universally assumed.

Before the BPM can be conceptualised as a 'social movement,' a critical conversation with hashtaggers is required, to access insight into users' driving principles and political consciousness. This is where the SMT and SNT, presented in this chapter, serve as a conceptual framework. It cannot be reliably presumed that every woman who uses a hashtag identifies the action as 'feminist,' nor political in intent. The research problem derives from the hashtag's disembodied and dislocated constitution. Harris (2012, p.1) reflects how 'once young people's resistance politics, and young women's feminist activism in particular, could be easily identified, today these seem obscure, transitory and disorganized [sic].' Discursive networked advocacy lacks in a centralised shared values statement, bricks-and-mortar headquarters, or formal subscription system. The BPM's subsequent redundancy in stable structure poses problems when conceptualising its

diffused collective modality of political expression.

This ambiguity in analysis has been encountered in the course of existing protest studies, seeking to conceptualise social justice dissent in the social media age. For instance, Barnett Cosby (2019, pp.96-97) looked at social media activists belonging to the Take-a-Knee movement. A sizeable sample of 800 instances of hashtag use was scrutinised. Findings concluded that the majority of users who posted a Take-a-Knee hashtag were merely casual online supporters, as opposed to 'truly representatives or even agents of the movement in an organized [sic] way' (Barnett Cosby, 2019, p.97). This case of hashtag hijacking led to frustration being felt by active movement members over the dilution of their cause. Barnett Cosby (2019, p.97) reported how this mass endorsement was perceived to risk 'watering down' and 'drowning out' the 'true voice' of the movement to the detriment of transmitting fundamental 'ideologies, principles and goals.'

One of the pitfalls of co-creational activism (Xiong, et al., 2019, p.19) is the questionable presence of underlying and unifying political purpose. After all, hashtagging is an individualist virtual behaviour. For social movement study, a research problem is created because crowds are only formed by mutual hyperlink use and do not necessarily overtly identify as members of a unified movement. Sastre (2014, p.933) previously dismissed the BPM's eligibility to be classified as a 'social movement.' A status denied on the basis that the BPM lacked a 'central resource' to guide collective discourse and a leading 'figurehead' to provide direction (Sastre, 2014, p.933). The resulting hashtag community was disregarded due to its indiscernible 'boundaries,' leading Sastre (2014, p.930) to conclude that the BPM was best described as a 'loose set of philosophies.' A shortcoming also observed in Darwin's (2017, pp.3-4) study, which concluded that the BPM demonstrated a 'lack of clear goal or purpose.'

These quandaries contribute to well-established debates within the school of SMT. It is important to remember that in a post-1970s protest environment, Melucci (1984, p.819) declared 'an end to social movements.' A point

seconded by J.A. Banks in *The Sociology of Social Movements* (1972). In this landmark work, Banks (1972, p.15) advocated social movements should be alternatively referred to as 'social technologies,' in order that movements could be properly appreciated as 'creators rather than creatures of social change.' Banks (1972, p.29) appreciated the 'technological and social creativeness' behind surfacing contemporary mobilisations. The classically over formulaic ways of envisaging social movements, centred on industrial action, were perceived to be in a state of 'crisis' (Melucci, 1984, p.819). Melucci (1984) responded by embarking on a more fluid 'reassessment' through formulating the NSM. This was designed to accommodate new articulations of collective action rooted in identity politics and loosely structured calls for cultural change.

In all social movements, there is a degree of diversity in opinion and lack of coherency. Identity-based social movement activity is often mistakenly overrepresented as removed from 'structural locations' altogether, on the basis that 'seeking recognition for new identities' does not involve 'tangible instrumental goals' (Bernstein, 2008, p.290). On the contrary, a key function of this chapter is to present Melucci's three-point theoretical framework, with a view to help distinguish any significant common ground and meaningful direction within the BPM. A step informed by SMT recognition that when identity celebration is actively politically strategised, it is always accompanied by goals, otherwise it is mere exhibitionism (Bernstein, 1997).

The application of Melucci's structural guidance is vital because this problem is not a newly encountered conundrum in the classification of collective shows of 'feminist' activism. The lack of a cohesive movement message is claimed to be a characteristic of all so-called feminist 'waves.' Kavka (2001, p.ix) recounts of second-wave feminism:

> Perhaps with some nostalgia, many of us who call ourselves feminists look back at the peak of the second-wave in the 1970s, to a feminism that in retrospect seems to have had a clear object (women), a clear goal (to change the fact of women's subordination), and even a clear definition (political struggle against patriarchal oppression). Such clarity is a trick of the memory, no doubt.

Whereas in *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl,* Carrie Brownstein (2015, p.122) reflected of third-wave feminism: 'One of the best aspects of Riot Grrrl was that anyone could adopt the term as their own – it wasn't prescriptive. However, this ambiguity left room for a lot of interpretation.' This sentiment was shared by Claire Snyder (2008, p.175) who described 'a confusing hodgepodge of personal anecdotes and individualistic claims.' The same can be observed of alleged fourth-wave feminism, in relation to body positivity.

The BPM's existence provokes critical enquiry to discern if collective feminist consciousness can be homogenised with a hashtag. There is a knowledge gap regarding whether a movement message can be empirically detected. This desire to measure the political propensity of the BPM is further inspired by how fourth-wave feminism's disjointed networked profile has been subjected to criticism:

> Similar to the ways in which political consciousness-raising lost its bite as it devolved into a space for airing of personal grievances without a goal or purpose in sight, the Internet can serve as a space for a similar lack of direction (Brandt & Kizer, 2015, p.124).

Historic accounts show that it may be unrealistic to expect hashtag expressions of fourth-wave feminism to adhere to strict SMT conventions, given that previous cycles of protest have not done so. Jolly (2019, p.8) recounts, the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) 'eschewed leaders' and was comprised from 'a network of loosely related lobbying groups and communities rather than any singular organized [sic] campaign.' A tendency to indulge in rose-tinted nostalgia dominates retrospective contemplative accounts, centred on togetherness and communal clarity of vision. Instead of seeing nonconformity as a 'failure' of feminism, my research will make a case for 'conventional' forms of civic participation to give way for feminised expressions of political activism and agency. Like virtual activism, feminist activism can be mutually messy and non-uniform, but nevertheless, important and warrant political interrogation.

Conceptualising 'Social Movement' Activity

I respond to criticism raised in the literature (Siméant, et al., 2016, np) that existing social movement study has narrowly considered protest as the 'traditional weapon of the working class.' A tendency reflected through overemphasis on industrial activity, such as labour strikes and picket lines. Conversely, my work generates insight relating how feminist claims-making commands a more dynamic understanding of political activism and agency. This adjustment begins with the incorporation of 'everyday actions' into protest conceptualisations (Siméant, et al., 2016, np).

Contemporary social movement theorists recognise the importance of informal sites, where opportunities for the 'enactment of new selves' are offered, and the need to incorporate these into future assessments of political identity formation (Shepard, 2011, p.xv). Accordingly, they expand definitions beyond situationist 'dour meetings' (Shepard, 2011, p.xvi) to encompass flexible opportunities for activism. Therefore, 'bodies, streets, organizations [sic] and buildings, among others, are sites of play in which past repertoires are elaborated and challenged, discarded and reinvented' Shepard, 2011, p.xvi).

In addition, Meuleman & Boushel (2014, p.60) argue the hashtag has introduced a disruptive set of 'ruling relations' regarding protest networks. They suggest that traditional boundaries separating formal 'social movement organisations' and informal individual 'everyday life' have dissipated (Meuleman & Boushel, 2014, p.60). Subsequently, SNSs have catalysed an amalgamation where all activity is now, somewhat haphazardly, thrown 'under the banner of a "social movement"' (Meuleman & Boushel, 2014, p.60). The application of SMT frameworks is essential to understanding how protest is being presented as part of emerging virtual activism, which includes reading hashtagging behaviours. Diani (2000) described the intersection where the internet and cycles of protest meet as messy, therefore conceptual frameworks provide a valuable reference point when embarking on digital analysis (Postill & Pink, 2011).

Melucci and Social Movement Theory

Alberto Melucci is a leading social movement theorist who integrated everyday politics into his classification of activism. During the 1970s, the term, NSM was created. This term is used to describe the advent of post-industrial protest activity, concentrated more on 'quality-of-life gains,' and less vested in the pursuit of formal policy-orientated outcomes (Ryan, 2006, p.173; Taylor & Todd, 2003, p.19). Key theorists, such as Melucci (1989), developed NSM theory to respond to the fact that classical social movement classifications proved incongruous for the purpose of analysing emerging modes of activism. NSMs represented a cultural turn, whereby the 'old' social movements associated with class-based Marxist concerns, were making way for collective organisation around identity politics (Buechler, 1995).

Hashtag Activism and Assigning a 'single social unit' status

This project uses the conceptual framework provided by Melucci in his 1989 work, *Nomads of the Present,* to structure my investigation. Melucci's classification consists of three qualifying components that constitute 'social movement' activity (Beaumont, et al., 2020). Firstly, he expresses 'a form of collective action which involves solidarity, that is actors' mutual recognition that they are part of a single social unit' (Melucci, 1989, p.29). Hashtag feminism represents an unfolding process of 'co-construction' where users are hyperlinked, via their shared sentiments, into collective units (Anstead & Chadwick, 2018, p.246). Although critics such as Staggenborg (2015, p.3) indicate how through hashtagging: 'it is not always apparent how it is possible to bring together a variety of groups and individuals with varying interests and ideologies to form a cohesive movement capable of effecting real change.' After all, the same hashtag does necessarily maintain the same meaning throughout its worldwide network.

The feminist identity has been situated as central to internet protest practice, Horwitz & Daly (2019, p.81) champion 'the (digital) future is female,' while also conceding that it is fragmented. They claim that tensions between the

individual and collective identity have caused a 'disjuncture' to exist in digital feminisms (Horwitz & Daly, 2019, p.91). The hashtag, synonymous with fourth-wave feminist conceptualisations, does not necessarily signal that everybody concerned stakes membership to a homogenous protest logic. Similar concerns were realised during Darwin & Miller's (2020) investigation into the BPM. The study found that the BPM was extremely conflicted in outlook to the extent that evidence of a unified direction proved elusive. Instead, Darwin & Miller (2020, p.5) noted the existence of four competing discursive frameworks and reflected that further study was necessitated to comprehend if the BPM signified one conflicted movement, or contained a series of separate movements. Going forwards, a two-way academic exchange was required. Whereas Darwin & Miller (2020) had conducted content analysis of SNSs, my fieldwork makes an original contribution to knowledge by finding out if #BodyPositive hashtaggers feel like members of a body positive social movement.

Investigation into the Fridays for Future international environmental movement on Instagram found that user-generated content strongly evidenced emotive attachment and identification to the cause (Brünker, et al., 2019). However, a sense of peer-to-peer solidarity was found to be lacking within the sizable global spread of Instagram interactions (Brünker, et al., 2019, p.308). These findings importantly illustrate how high levels of individualist networked 'movement' activity do not necessarily translate into strong collective activist affiliations. Correspondingly, Alentola (2017, p.9) observed of the BPM's discursive constitution: 'There is no list of members, but instead self-defined evaluations of whether the picture should or should not be hashtagged with a body positivity related hashtag.' Digital fieldwork suggested hashtagging was transforming the parameters of social movement membership. There is a need to enhance insight regarding the terms of engagement governing hashtagger relationships. It is currently unknown if a sense of comradeship exists within BPM networked structures.

By committing participant perspectives to academic record, through qualitative surveying, these underlying subjectivities could be understood.

The most feasible way to approach assessing whether a sense of cohesive 'single unit' community existed was to initiate direct questioning with users from that perceived community structure. This signifies an especially important avenue of enquiry following Gibson's (2020) study into 'body positive babes.' Gibson's (2020, p.1) work discovered the existence of conflicting internal 'proxies' within the BPM, plus exclusionary 'absences' of perspective, which were said to continue to 'haunt' the movement and threaten future eligibility as a cohesive community structure.

In adopting Melucci's (1989, p.29) framework, my study enquires whether single activist units, premised on solidarity, can be built online comprised from hashtags. Staggenborg (2012, p,187) asserts: 'movements need leadership and vision in order to create the collective action frames, organizational [sic] vehicles, and strategies and tactics necessary for ongoing and effective campaigns.' The logistics of political agency distribution have been severely disrupted by digitisation, to critics such as Staggenborg (2012; 2015), hashtivism is piecemeal and lacking in the conventional certainties of previous IRL protest. This interruption to the established order, though lacking in certain traditional social movement staples and deviant in physical structure, may still possess coalescence in terms of internal value structures.

Assessing the Presence of Conflict

The second key identifier for a social movement for Melucci (1989, p.29) was the presence of 'conflict' in 'opposition to an adversary.' Due to the current knowledge gap, there is an absence of empirical data extracted from BPM members on these matters, meaning a collective cause remains inconclusive. The increasingly upward trajectory of hashtag use metrics means more content is being created online by BPM Instagrammers. These statistics cannot however convey the presence of political purpose, merely evidence that picture-taking is taking place on a mass scale.

A peak in hashtag usage does not necessarily correspond with critical uptake

for campaigning purposes. Campbell (2005, p.3) declares that the presence of 'rhetorical agency' is evidenced through: 'the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized [sic] or heeded by others in one's "community."' On the contrary, BPM social media output has been scrutinised for its perceived lack of conflict shown towards countering oppressive structures (Haney, et al., 2021, pp.312-313). Fat Studies scholar, Virgie Tovar (2018, p.94) contemplates: 'It was the silence in the body positivity movement that allowed traction to be gained. If there's nothing articulated then there's nothing to violate, no need to call anyone out if there's nothing to call out.'

Glenn (2018, p.4) regards 'rhetorical feminism' as being 'anchored in hope' because 'it offers ways to disidentify with hegemonic rhetoric' plus 'respects alternative delivery systems.' However, the selfie, the BPM's choice of alternative delivery system, has been criticised as a politically blunt instrument. In Eva Wiseman's article, '"Body positivity" has had its day. Let's find peace with ourselves' (*The Guardian*, Sunday 12th January 2020, online) common BPM tropes were dismissed as '"smile for the camera" pressures.' A disparaging label issued on the basis that selfie-empowerment fails to critically engage with, and mobilise against, the oppressors responsible for generating fat-shaming social conditions in the first place. Such commentaries do not comply with Melucci's (1989, p.29) 'social movement' classification of a single social unit engaged in purposive conflict.

In 2018, an article was written for *Red* magazine, entitled 'Laura Jane Williams isn't talking about weight and body image anymore.' Williams formerly engaged in self-shooting swimsuit rituals, but used this opportunity to denounce individualised acts of embodied 'resistance.' The feature contained the rationale behind her public departure from future engagement in BPM displays of 'empowering exhibitionism':

> No matter what our intentions are in discussing body image, we inadvertently end up making things worse because to analyse and dissect our appearance at all continues to fuel the idea that bodies

exist to be analysed and dissected – no matter how positively we do it (Williams, 2018, np).

Here Williams (2018) deplores the cycle of aesthetical fixation perpetuated by selfie-empowerment strategies, adding, 'if you want a true body image revolution, it starts with refusing to give body scrutiny the caption space at all.' This critical thought piece presents the lived reality of a social media user who challenges the 'revolutionary' connotations associated with BPM image events. Williams' (2018) work exposed that a tension exists between BPM trademark bodily displays being perceived as sources of self(ie) empowerment, or contrarily, as evidence of self(ie) objectification.

The presence of assimilatory tendencies calls into question the BPM's reformative inclinations and conflictive disposition towards the current world order. My research investigates whether, through the hashtag, the isolated activity of individual Instagram users bridges into social movement activity. Through data collection, it explores if there is evidence to suggest that geographically dispersed hashtagger populations share combined ambitions towards meaningful social change outcomes. Wonneberger, et al. (2020) similarly sought out 'common clusters' amidst animal welfare activism hashtags on Twitter, to see if dominant discourses were achievable within co-constituted communication networks. The work resulted in the successful location of discursive 'common clusters' and 'sub-clusters' from a substantial protestor sample (Wonneberger, et al., 2020, p.6). Likewise, my study responds to the need to build up a more collective picture of the BPM's ideological standpoint. This is in the interests of evaluating if a core critical challenge can be pinpointed from within a large dataset of Instagrammer testimonies.

SMT has previously been applied to analysis of the BPM. In charting the BPM's development, Lane (2017, p.5) presented it as a 'successful social movement' with 'goals.' Nevertheless, a key shortcoming of Lane's (2017) work resided with its limited scope. Conclusions were drawn from just four isolated body positive organisations, campaigns and activists (BPOCAs). Rather than gathering findings from across the breadth of the hashtag as a

whole. This was a small sample from which to draw generalisations about a global community. Moreover, an appreciation of the grassroots element, so critical to public protest, was lost through overemphasis on high-profile figures and formal agencies. A data deficit remains when it comes to the capture of everyday 'people power.' The work also fell short of enlisting evidence of the BPM's political priorities if it was to be fully appreciated in a social movement capacity. The report's author explicitly recommended that the BPM required 'more consideration and examination from social scientists and social movement scholars' (Lane, 2017, p.5). In response, this project centres on the collection of a large sample of protestor perspectives to analyse if a shared standpoint can be derived from a more substantial dataset.

Isolating Social Change Objectives

Thirdly, and lastly, Melucci (1989, p.29) states that 'a social movement breaks the limits of compatibility of a system' achieved via re-establishing the 'tolerance limits' of that current social order. A key research task rests with determining the presence of a political ideology amongst the #BodyPositive network. Social movement scholars, such as Sutton (2007, p.140), highlight that the body 'is not only inscribed with culture but it also a resource for political resistance.' This statement therefore provokes critical enquiry regarding what displays of BPM embodied resistance are attempting to resist.

The gay liberation movement has used performative queer bodies as spectacles to make marginalised sexualities visible through public exhibitionism (Lucas, 1994). Social movement organisation through gay pride parades is said to be indicative of a wider protest shift away from conventional political lobbying, and towards diversity celebration (Greer, 2012a, p.145). There is significant overlap in protest logic here as both the LGBT+ and BPM community orchestrate affirmative body performances to counter stigma (Whitesel, 2014).

It is commonplace for BPM Instagrammers to rely on the picture-based circulation of their nonconforming bodies to 'do the talking.' The body acts as a 'text' (Peterson, 2001) by providing an 'argumentative resource' (DeLuca, 1999). These digital mediations are defiant because to embody a fat female identity type, that is fat and happy, can represent an act of protest in itself (Hagen, 2019). I will produce research informed contributions to assess if social change incentives underlie the BPM's fat-positive expressions. This is important work, as Pussy Riot co-founder, Nadya Tolokonnikova (2019, p.42) reminds in her guide to activism: 'Political struggle is boring… It's like brushing your teeth in the early morning – you have to do it, but it's not a super pleasurable thing.' Tolokonnikova (2019, p.53) served prison time for her political protest and stresses the need for a collective unit to 'question the very basis of existing society' minus consideration for 'anyone's personal ambitions.' This links up with Melucci's (1989) qualification that in NSMs, the rectification of broader identity grievances is the underpinning driver.

Instagram photography is a predominantly individual practice. The production of these pictures by social media influencers, acting out of self-interest, has been highlighted by Arriagada & Ibáñez (2020). Interview data revealed the extent to which a lot of online content creation is capital-driven. A reality demonstrated through one excerpt that simply stated: 'On Instagram, uploading one or two pictures per week, you're dead. You need at least one picture daily' (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020, p.7). SNSs are not only potential protest platforms, they additionally signify workplaces to people.

In the interests of theorising social media as possible 'social movement' activity, the application of Melucci's (1989) framework helps establish if isolated images are bridged by hyperlinked connectivity into a distinguishable collective cause. Savigny (2020, p.15) deemed hashtag networks responsible for enabling a 'politics of feminist rage' stating: 'The agency that I see in women is incredibly powerful; young women especially have a strength and a voice that I did not have years ago.' It was important that I evidenced this 'rage,' in connection with a real-life case study, as every

instance of unfolding 'rage' is preceded by a trigger. A fresh dataset is needed to gauge if those hashtagging harbour aspirations to dismantle an oppressive existing system through collective action or if we assign them the status of 'social media matter.'

In connection to embodied performance, agency and structural change, DeLuca (1999) investigated three real-life protest groups – Earth First!, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and Queer Nation. He observed how all three rejected 'traditional organizational [sic] structures' (DeLuca, 1999, p.9). Alternatively, DeLuca found that these movements relied on non-verbal performative strategies, thought to signal a wider tendency towards 'radically democratic disorganizations [sic]' that:

> neglect conventional legislative and material goals while practicing the powers of naming, worldview framing and identity-making… They slight formal modes of public argument while performing unorthodox political tactics that highlight bodies as resources for augmentation and advocacy (DeLuca, 1999, p.9).

Here the body is validated as a political apparatus, yet on the understanding that it is framed as an active message carrier and not apathetically occupying space. In his conceptualisation of image events, DeLuca (1999) stresses that embodied performances should not be the products of passive posing, but undertaken with abundant activist principles. DeLuca's (1999) work is significant because it recognises the existence of a rhetorical agency, that allows argument and advocacy to be channelled via an embodied performance politics. My study recognises the need to progress these ideas surrounding image politics into the screen society, to see if visual social media tools are being put to social good in this way.

This essential analysis is undertaken to get behind what BPM exhibitionist empowerment strategies are trying to say. In discussing motherhood and fatness, Sherezada Windham-Kent (2018, p.178) argues:

> Activism is more than just a social media hashtag, more than just a series of cute selfies. It's a radical shift in mentality. It's internal as well as external… I can still be a body-positive warrior in old sweats while pushing my son on the swing.

An aesthetical emphatic style aside, body positivity needs to be about adopting a progressive perspective to be considered a 'movement.' Self-empowerment should be orientated in overthrowing an existing order and not merely consumed with self-ornamentation. For while individually-orchestrated Instagram body displays may signal-boost the BPM's brand presence, exhibitors do not always participate as ambassadors for a profound manifesto (Gelsinger, 2021, p.50). Comparatively, Stokes (2013) indicates that the guiding goals of radical fat feminist activism during the 1960s and 1970s were voiced through shared value statements. One such text is the *Fat Liberation Manifesto*, which explicitly stated group grievances: 'WE are angry at mistreatment by commercial and sexist interests. These have exploited our bodies as objects of ridicule, thereby creating an immensely profitable market selling the false promise of avoidance of, or relief from, that ridicule' (Freespirit & Aldebaran, 1973 cited in Freespirit & Aldebaran, 1979). Stokes (2013, p.52) positions manifestoes as pivotal to 'creating space for alternative ideologies' because such literature leverages 'a place at the political table.'

Figure 2.2

BPM Instagrammers celebrate 'back rolls, 'belly chub', 'power thighs' and 'stretchmarks' - conventionally framed as feminine flaws - through selfies.

Source: Pictured left, an underwear selfie by @aspoonfulofalice, dated 21st August 2020. Pictured right, a stomach selfie, by @anniemilia_ , dated 7th August 2020.

Both printed with written permission.

I approach this research with a view to establish what 'place at the political table' BPM hashtaggers are 'demanding.' Figure 2.2 features Instagram posts from two BPM members. Both hashtaggers pose for celebratory selfies, where a self-described 'big bum' and rainbow-painted stretchmarks on an exposed abdomen are presented. The user-generated content unquestionably shares personal details, yet it currently remains unfounded if it can be considered 'political.' In *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*, Linda Scott (2005) urges feminists to abandon their overemphasis on appearance and recalibrate focus towards the main mission of gender equality for women once more.

This critique is a long held one within critical feminist theory. Notably, Germaine Greer wrote in *The Female Eunuch*: 'Every human body has its optimum weight and contour, which only health and efficiency can establish. Whenever we treat women's bodies like aesthetic objects without function we deform them and their owners' (Greer, 2012b, p.41). Adoption of a fat-positive attitude may encourage women to make peace with their 'feminine flaws.' In *Fierce Fatty: Love Your Body and Live Like the Queen You Already Are,* Victoria Welsby (2018, p.44) advocates: 'You loving yourself and accepting yourself unashamedly is a political act. You are literally changing the world for those who come after you and those who surround you.' Nonetheless, there appears to be an overall absence of structural challenge to redress why gendered fat-shaming processes are so firmly engrained in Western values (Wiseman, 2020). These digital behaviours consequently adhere to Phipps' (2014, p.4) critical vision of a fourth-wave feminism, orientated in self-betterment objectives, while leaving patriarchal systems unconfronted.

In *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*, Polletta (2006) situated 'storytelling' as a legitimate form of feminist protest. A placement taken to counter the fact that 'politics and power' have historically been framed as exclusively male preserves (Polletta, 2006, p.110). Nevertheless, even feminised framings of political activism stress that the standalone sharing of self and struggle is inadequate. Disclosed lived experiences are

merely a preliminary springboard to inform social change organisation. Herbert Blumer (1995, p.60) typifies that social movements not only have to be 'collective enterprises' but motivated towards establishing a 'new way of life.' The public exchange of personal details is merely descriptive. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) were a suffrage society that encouraged militant action. To quote their mantra, 'Deeds not words,' are what is required to make a difference. A proactive approach seemingly extended into the standpoints of active Instagrammers; as Aubrey Gordon (2020, p.158) contends, in *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat*, 'I did not come to body positivity for self-esteem. I came to it for social justice.'

Figure 2.3

Heavy Girl (1997) zine, Issue 1

Women's grassroots image production conveys how the fat female body does not only serve as a sex symbol, but a prominent protest symbol.

Source: Glasgow Women's Library

Front cover artwork by Fiona Smyth

To be considered 'social movement' activity, there is a need for peer exchanges to also actively strategise, accommodate social change generative tactics and forecast future expectations for reform (Borland, 2014, p. 488). For example, editor, Kerry Daniels (1997, p.3) explained that 1990s *Heavy Girl* zine (See Fig. 2.3) published body imagery with the intention to supply 'progressive female archetypes to choose from.' Protest scholar, Enck-Wanzer (2006, p.187) underlines, 'there is an instrumental element in any offensive.' Motivated by its interest to locate activism and agency in the screen society, my research aims to document any reformist qualities contained within BPM networks. It is a task driven by a need to know whether self-shooting Instagrammers are pushing established 'tolerance limits' (Melucci, 1989, p.29), or narcissistically pushing the buttons on their camera phones. Fourth-wave hashtag feminism has been correlated with the emergence of a 'call-out culture' (Munro, 2013, p.23), my project will generate an empirical evidence base to clarify what exactly the BPM is 'calling out.'

The Network Society

SNT analysis has performed a crucial function within sociological study, whereby transnational kinship networks such as blogs and SNSs, are centred as generators of social capital and facilitators of bonding movements (Ryan, 2006). The term 'techno-optimists' refers to thinkers who endorse SNS's capacity to problem solve and generate social change (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016, p.785). Manuel Castells is a prominent techno-optimist and network theorist who recognises the transformational power of citizen communications. SNSs are deemed responsible for affecting connectivity between previously isolated agents. Castells (2015, p.15) believes that this connective action has generated a 'new species of social movement': a leaderless, open-ended social movement structure with a flattened hierarchy, that is said to improve chances of support mobilisation (Hill, et al., 2016, p.689). This is a concept the research responds to in its choice of sample population, #BodyPositive hashtaggers.

The BPM appears to conform to Castells' characteristics, with its bottom-up, as opposed to top-down, distribution of agentic editorial control over content creation. Castells (2012, p.229) acknowledges social media as integral to the configuration of contemporary social movements. However, he emphasises that these platforms should not 'define' social movements, a concern shared by feminist theorist, Judy Wajcman (2000, p.460). She suggests that at the turn of the millennium, a time of increasing internet dependence:

> The internet can be a site for the creation of new feminist communities, and a new tool for political organizing [sic]… there is a risk that concentration on the Internet as the site of transformative feminist politics may exaggerate its significance.

The SNS, in itself, is not the political project. To Castells (2013), it is the exchange of user emotions which signifies the foundation of social movement activity, which hashtagging facilitates. A key criticism of Castells' work is it remains theoretically abstract. A drawback caused by his failure to support distanced suppositions with active data collection at the scene of unravelling social change organising (Anttiroiko, 2015, p.12).

A preliminary literature review however also revealed a surprising stipulation within Castells' classification of networked social movement activity. Despite his techno-optimist affiliations, Castells necessitates occupation of IRL urban space must play a role in protest (Hill, et al., 2016, p.698). In turn, my research responds to Castells' (2013) stipulation that for connective action to achieve formal 'social movement status,' it must also extend into offline mobilisations. Castells (2013, p. xxxix) affirms that activists' 'critical thought work' can be undertaken in digital domains. Yet, in his estimation, until this 'space of flows' is expanded to the occupation of urban space, it cannot be rightfully identified as a 'movement.'

Although Castells recognises the integral role information and communication technologies play in contemporary protest, this is seen as an assistive role. Networked solutions are seen to merely supplement the prototypical 'public square,' not replace it (Calderòn & Castells, 2020, p.75).

As seen in Harvey, Ringrose & Gill's (2013) study into the 2011 London Riots, which reported that youth uprisings possessed a synchronised online-offline dynamic when they were coordinated on Facebook and Blackberry Messenger. Castells (2019, p.92) deems SNSs responsible for creating a 'rupture' in established democratic processes, yet online mechanisms continue to be stubbornly hybridised with 'urban public space.'

This qualifying stipulation held interesting implications for my project. The BPM's online protest presence is explicitly quantifiable through public metrics visible on the Instagram platform. The digital footprint is trackable. For example, virtual interaction is definitive, via the number of posts, followers and likes publicly displayed. Whereas Castells' stance exposed a discrepancy regarding whether the hashtivism of the BPM expands to incorporate IRL instances, in order to achieve authentic 'social movement' status. Castells (2013, 2015) asserts that it is imperative for networked connective organising to span both, virtual and urban locations in the 'circulation of collective emotions.'

Very little investigation has been undertaken so far into how the BPM's political activism and agency is expressed in our physical communities. Gurrieri & Drenten (2019, p.101) coined the term, the 'hashtaggable body' to describe how SNSs have expanded agentic capacities to renegotiate embodied gendered roles. They specifically observe that BPM hashtags have enabled people to 'congregate' based on appearance characteristics (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019, p.106). I build on this observation by investigating if hyperlinked congregation translates into physical congregation in offline space also.

It has been noted (Lechner, 2019, p.71) that body positive 'popfeminist politics' attempt to create space for '"disgusting" female bodies' within 'popular culture,' while less has been said about the movement's literal occupation of urban space. This signifies a vital knowledge gap I will redress. Data collection will facilitate new understanding of how, or if, digital connective behaviours are supplemented by street-based collective action.

A selection of accounts detailing offline efforts are contained in media reportage. However, these articles are sporadic and small in quantity. For example, during 2019, Mandy Jones embarked on a body positive bikini protest outside a Glasgow high street store explaining:

> We want to march on Victoria's Secret because we want to show that we're happy with our bodies as they are. They're quite topical because they don't hire plus-size models and their spokesman has expressed transphobic views. There is a statement to be made here (Jones quoted in O'Neill, 2019, np).

Jones situates the public parade of a happy body as her manifesto, with a view to influence and reinvigorate closed corporate mindsets. Yet the unregimented nature of journalistic features gives little indication as to the broader scale of BPM protest mobility in physical spaces. I aim to deliver clarity in this regard by interrogating BPM members to build a bigger picture of group protest habits.

This research aim was formulated in direct reference to Castells' (2013) qualification, but equally influenced by how his concerns interrelate with feminist preoccupations. In *The Guilty Feminist*, Deborah Frances-White (2019, pp.9-10) calls for a 'fifth-wave' of feminism, on the basis that the current so-called 'fourth-wave' is deficient in terms of direct action:

> Fifth-wave feminism is forming itself now. All we know so far is that it is about action… It will take the social-networking capability of the fourth wave and use it to organise and galvanise and turn hashtags into consequences… The fifth wave is a global army that crowdfunds and realises proper, permanent changes can be made with the right strategies.

Encountering such sources of scepticism instils a need to know if the 'hashtaggable body' and the physical body coexist in cycles of hashtag feminism. Currently, there is a data deficit my project seeks to rectify through data collection, which will detail the protest behaviours of active BPM Instagrammers.

Techno-Pessimism

Castells is not an isolated voice regarding his exclusive legitimisation of public protest acts, only if they extend to the occupation of physical space. Existing literature is heavily populated with sceptical studies seeking to delegitimise the advent of connective action. Gladwell (2010, np) renders virtual activism redundant by claiming that the 'physicality of bodies' united in occupying space, 'risking life and limb', can only provide what social change 'really' requires (Merrifield, 2013, p.19). This contestation towards digitally-enacted dissent has been deemed a techno-pessimistic stance.
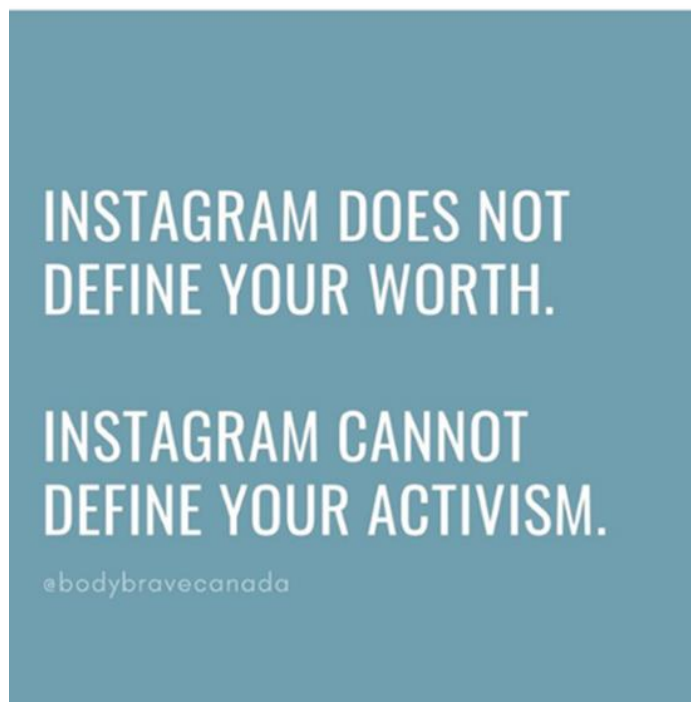
Figure 2.4

A body positive Instagram meme speculating over what 'counts' as activism.

Source: Body Brave Canada (2020)

Printed with written permission.

Virtual modes of civic participation are readily derided as armchair activism, one-click activism, clicktivism and slacktivism respectively. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest these critical attitudes exist within the BPM. Figure 2.4 presents an Instagram post containing apprehension towards those who protest exclusively through SNSs; the meme reminds: 'Instagram does not define your worth. Instagram cannot define your activism.' Through deployment of the survey instrument, I will analyse if hashtag feminism extends into offline physical spaces. Surveying permits the capture of experiential qualitative data containing Instagrammer protest patterns, plus confirmation of whether they self-identify as 'activists'.

Many techno-pessimistic positions derive from connective action's perceived little real-world impact (Cabrera, et al., 2017; Glenn, 2015). Criticality even comes from those who have adopted networked solutions to achieve social change. Gina Martin embarked on an 18-month legal campaign after she became the victim of upskirting at a music festival. A lot of Martin's activism was mobilised through sharing of the #StopSkirtingTheIssue hashtag. In 2019, upskirting was successfully integrated into legal frameworks as a criminal offence in England & Wales. Regardless, in her memoir, *Be the Change: A Toolkit for the Activist in You*, Martin (2019, p.145) stresses: 'If you want to be successful in bringing about change, you're going to need to put equal effort into both social media and IRL.' Social media is perceived as a supplementary 'add-on' in the activist toolkit, even from the perspective of the hashtivists themselves. Feminist scholarship has acknowledged the centrality of SNSs to feminist youth activism, yet with a proneness towards positioning the online as an overflow space for formal offline feminist clubs and societies (Kim & Ringrose, 2018).

The digital opportunities for participatory democratic societies, proposed by techno-optimists such as Castells, consequently become seen to offer an online inferior mode of action. This theme of subordinate status is continued by Jodi Dean (2009, p.10) who derides the notion of 'hashtivism' as a 'technology fetish.' Dean (2009) stresses that it is because of this technology fetish that citizens feel like negligible actions, such as hashtagging, possess more philanthropic meaning than they truly do. Morozov (2012, p.75) further states how: 'the internet makes it harder, not easier, to get people to care, if only because the alternatives to political action are so much more pleasant and risk-free.'

Likewise, these reservations towards hashtivism permeate the writing of women's liberation figureheads. Founder of the Everyday Sexism project, Laura Bates (2018, p.268) assesses the shortcomings of digital applications chosen to enact intersectional fourth-wave feminism:

> Social media isn't perfect – perhaps no single form of activism is. For a start, it excludes those without access to the internet or electronic devices, which is a major problem, so it needs to be used in conjunction with other efforts.

In Bates' (2018) estimation, the existence of the digital divide debases hashtagging as an independent expression of 'social movement' activity. More recently, Dabiri (2021, p.11) vindicated Instagram for producing 'hollow, gestural and performative' protest whereby 'doing anything' is being replaced with 'saying something.' Dabiri (2021, p.11) disapproves of the way SNSs have meant 'conversation' now commonly substitutes 'action.' She concludes that online discourse should not be 'misrepresented as "progressive," as activism, or as feminism' (Dabiri, 2021, p.132).

Screen-based mobilisation strategies, orientated in social change generation, are regularly ascribed a second-class status. This deep-rooted conceptual dualism between connective and collective action has led to the development of binary delineations between 'strong-tie' and 'weak-tie definitions of activism (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Strong-tie activism is a term used to describe more traditionalist forms of protest, such as marches, rallies, occupations and sit-ins. Whereas weak-tie activism is more typically reserved for less time-intensive forms of protest such as hashtags, likes, retweets and the signing of e-petitions.

This oppositional categorisation is evident in how both, Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2009) argue that technological advancement is responsible for the decline of 'real' activism. Leading Gladwell (2010, np) to concede, 'weak ties seldom lead to high risk activism.' Discovery of the weak and strong tie dichotomy informed my research design. A major aim is to deepen understanding of how the body and Instagram are enacted as sites of political activism and agency. This imparted knowledge structure helps to demonstrate what types of mobilisation strategies hashtag feminists deploy. My resulting dataset makes informed contributions to the ongoing 'activism versus slacktivism' debate outlined in this section.

The Importance of Armchair Activism

The devaluing of hashtag feminism as 'slacktivism' has been perceived to be part of overarching patriarchal oppression. In *The Bitch Doctrine: Essays for Dissenting Adults,* feminist writer, Laurie Penny (2018, pp.3-4) argues hashtagging is derided because it matters:

> to people who aren't white men in rural towns or young boys in bedrooms convinced that their inability to get laid is an injustice that must be answered in blood and suffering… All politics are identity politics, but some identities are more politicised than others.

Thompson (2020, pp.23-24) contends: 'protest and political action are not just marching in the streets and calling one's senator to vocalize [sic] dissent.' Classical social movement theorists assumed that to qualify as a 'social movement,' a collective would struggle to achieve a formal set of political goals, via purposely chosen repertoires of action (Fuchs, 2014, p.50). When, to quote punk feminist pioneer, Kathleen Hanna in *The Riot Grrrl Manifesto* (1991, np): 'we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't.'

Guillard (2016, p.610) stresses that social movement theorists tend to view SNSs as a 'lesser-than-tool of civic engagement.' This is doubly discriminatory since cyber citizen channels are heavily populated with female userships. Furthermore, these mechanisms of gendered delegitimisation towards female-selected modalities signal nothing new. Scripts of sexist degradation have continued from third-wave to fourth-wave feminist outputs. History appears to be repeating itself, as third-wave social justice zines published by politically-minded girls were also roundly ignored (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004, p.408). This thesis aims to centre and validate the activist voices of hashtag feminists and raise awareness of the political platforms selected by women today.

Women are reminded at regular intervals that the way they make themselves heard is wrong. Such as how during her 2019 International Women's Day keynote speech, the Duchess of Sussex instructed period poverty activists, 'their hashtags are not enough' (Markle quoted in Furness, 2019, np).

Markle continued, 'we have a responsibility as well, that if you're part of social media and engaging in that way, we're not just giving people more things to chat about but actually something to do, and what's the action' (Markle quoted in Furness, 2019, np). In addition, former US President, Barack Obama publicly dismissed the internet's idiosyncratic 'call-out culture' of political 'wokeness' by admonishing: 'that's not activism' (Obama quoted in Rueb & Bryson Taylor, 2019).

My decision to investigate Instagram's political potentiality was informed by the fact evidence stands contrary to these public statements. Chen, et al. (2018) report how when people do participate in small actions deemed 'weak tie' activism - such as using a hashtag - they are more likely to partake in significant forms of offline activism. Small (2020, p.180) highlights how feminist movements, such as the 2011 SlutWalks and 2017 Washington Women's March, both started out as hashtag campaigns before escalating to direct action. Consequently, these findings potentially position hashtag feminism as a source for public good, due to hashtagging's utility as a 'gateway' to what Gladwell (2010) would deem 'real' activism.

This point is supported by research findings from Alentola (2017) who conducted interviews with a small sample of BPM Instagrammers. Alentola (2017, p.37) reflected that for many BPM members, the connective action first endeavoured on SNSs had helped them to transfer body positivity into their offline lives. A stance also corroborated by interview data collected during the 2014 #Ferguson protests. One 19-year-old activist declared: 'Hashtag activism is activism!... We might be tweeting from a couch, but we're also getting up and doing the work that needs to be done (Vega, 2014 cited in Burns & Eaton, 2016, p.14). This protestor perspective highlights how the recurrent binarisation of two online-offline mobilisation modes fails to appreciate how spheres routinely interrelate, rather than work in opposition.

Figure 2.5

A meme featured in an Instagram post, dated 24th January 2020.

Source: Ragen Chastain (2020)

Printed with written permission.

Fat activist, Ragen Chastain argues that the demotion of hashtivism to so-called slacktivism is ableist and classist. Chastain advocates: 'Armchair Activism is Important Activism' (See Fig 2.5). This position is taken on the basis that SNSs enable members from marginalised communities to achieve greater integration within the field of protest. Groups, such as people from low-income households and the disabled, may find it difficult to attend what Chastain (2020, np) terms 'in person' activism. She contends that those threatened by police brutality, living with chronic pain or an aversion to crowds can achieve a lot online which would be implausible in offline settings. The surveying of BPM Instagrammers can therefore attain two things. Hashtaggers can be questioned whether their BPM protest activity makes the transition from keyboard to street, in accordance with Castells' social movement classification. Furthermore, hashtaggers can be asked if the internet has enabled them to increase involvement in political protest.

This position is reinforced by Mendes, Ringrose & Keller's (2019) study into digital feminist counter publics on Twitter against rape culture. During their own online survey, digital engagement was not presented by users as a less meaningful form of protest, symptomatic of 'slacktivism.' Instead, networked tools were described in an enabling capacity. One survey respondent, a 26-

year-old disabled activist called Monica from North England declared SNSs foster inclusion as 'it's often the case that many protests and marches happen in London' (quoted in Mendes, et al., 2019, p.106). Techno-pessimists are quick to criticise armchair activism and render hashtagging an inferior activity. In applying this hierarchy of worth, it is recklessly assumed that everybody is privileged to exercise a choice between offline and online protest to begin with.

Virtual advocacy can also propose a less risk-intense form of feminist connectivity than offscreen protest (Harlow, 2012). After all, activists do encounter violent state intervention during direct action. This threat signifies another barrier to offline participation. Chastain (2020, np) cites how 'black and brown people can be risking their lives at activist events where racist police are involved.' Moreover, a study into activist experiences at anti-fracking protests found that women often felt 'violated and frightened' due to 'acts of power' carried out by the police, such as groping and removing clothing to expose their breasts (Gilmore, et al., 2019, p.34). The gathering of hashtagger testimonies enables my study to expand these conversations and appraise Instagram, not only as an 'activism light' option, but as an enabler to female political activism and agency.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the research problems encountered when approaching the analysis of hashtag feminism. It has critiqued how the ideas we collectively hold about protest have been largely forged within patriarchal societies with little regard for female agency. This thesis was positioned as both, a call to arms and a much-needed break from protest norms, as a strong case was made for the decentralisation of male-coded political action. I argued that the advent of social media is revolutionising the way we think about social movement participation. In many ways, I have explained that this shift in perspective is long overdue, as feminist action has never really 'fitted in' with the regimented frameworks imparted by the forefathers of social movement theory.

Throughout these sections, I have critiqued classical frameworks used to explain the contemporary digital activism of women who have been systemically denied space and agency in public life. Chapter Two primarily functioned as a forward-thinking mission statement detailing the concepts deployed to start validating, rather than sanctioning, feminised embodied protest efforts. This signals a departure from patriarchal traditions of telling women they are performing politics wrong, towards beginning to record how they revolt, resist and rebel in unorthodox ways. Although Chapter Two charted the undeniable challenges faced when approaching the analysis of hashtag feminism as 'social movement' activity, these are not challenges it chose to shy away from. By introducing pragmatic social movement theorist perspectives, a progressive framework was developed that will play a key role in making space for the screen, as well as the street, in the study of feminist resistance.

Going forwards, Melucci's (1989) work enlisted several criteria to help separate empty posturing from purposively choreographed image events. These concepts perform a critical function in helping fulfil my objectives to analyse feminist and political subjectivities from digital interactions. In later sections, I outlined the landmark work of network social movement theorist, Manuel Castells. Though hugely receptive to the shift induced by SNSs, new critical lines of enquiry were drawn from Castells' specification that screen-based activism must be supplemented by street-based activity. This was done to situate his position within the broader 'activism versus slacktivism' debate. Subsequently, the research objective to quantify whether online 'connective' action overlaps with offline 'collective' action was established in direct response to these arising theoretical arguments. The next chapter will continue the literature review by expanding the discussion to the body's positioning within historical cycles of feminist protest. Whereas Chapter Two provided working definitions of social movement protest, Chapter Three concentrates on the cultural catalysts behind fat feminist protest.

Chapter 3: The Body in Feminism

Introduction

The previous chapter established what is theoretically understood to define a group of people rallying around a cause as a 'social movement.' This chapter will now locate through the literature how the female body presents an established site of campaigning and contention within feminist discourse and activism (Ali, 2019). According to Hohle (2009, p.283), the body has remained at the centre of historical political power struggles yet languishes largely neglected in social movement studies. This is especially the case regarding the female body, where a state of bodily autonomy has continued to elude, from voting to reproductive rights. It is only by contextualising the ways the 'feminine' body is culturally constituted within gendered structures of sexism and subordination, that hashtag feminism can be situated within an ongoing protest dynamic.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Melucci's (1989) 'social movement' framework prioritised the presence of an adversary, a source of conflict, that protesting bodies seek to counter. To apply this analytical framework when investigating whether BPM social media activity can be classified as 'social movement' activity, there is a need to first outline the systemic social injustice they collectively reject. Discussions contained in this chapter situate female fatness within the patriarchal power relations responsible for production of dominant diet culture discourses. Informed by academic and archival materials, Chapter Three serves to establish the oppressive conditions created when fat and female identities are dually inhabited within the Western world. This chapter provides a literary grounding vital to conceiving how fat was a 'feminist issue' long before the emergence of fourth-wave feminism's networked advocation.

Siméant, et al. (2016) argue that traditional SMT has overly focused on 'conventional' working-class labour protests. This oversight is at the expense of absorbing forms of feminine embodied resistance. Since first-wave feminism, female bodies have been starved and thrown in the pathway

of the King's oncoming horse in the name of women's suffrage[4]. Stevens & Houston (2016) observe that visual celebrations of the 'natural' body are central to the political purpose of fourth-wave feminism. I extend existing knowledge through applying SMT to these digital displays, adopted as a means of corporeal affront, by millions of women today.

A key research aim focuses on interpreting if women's personal Instagram activity is considered 'political' fourth-wave feminist activity. The hashtag is said to reflect an 'international language of social media' responsible for organising contemporary revolutions and a mobiliser of mass uprisings (Shiri, 2015, p.250). To be classified as 'political' protest however, a crowd must 'co-constructively dissent' against an established world order (Shiri, 2015, p.250). This chapter evaluates the exclusionary world order, known as the 'cult of thinness' (Hesse-Biber, 2007) and typified by weight stigma, that body positivity seeks to redress.

For one to understand a resistance, one must understand what that collective's action resists. BPM member, Jes Baker (2018, p.236) notes how body positive spaces are comprised from 'Bulletproof Fatties,' a place for fat people 'to just be' in rebellion, following traumatisation from diet culture. Analysis of the literature was guided by a need to know if this critical counter-voice was continued within the collective attitudes of fellow Instagrammers.

Furthermore, significant attention is devoted to which voices are being amplified within the BPM. Following a review of existing literature, fat became understood not only to be a feminist issue, but a race one also. Class is an additional consideration that is beyond the scope of this single study. A focus on the axes of weight, gender and racial identity is motivated by specific concerns raised in relation to the BPM. An intersectional framework is explained and applied to address the role race relations play in the expression of black embodied activism and agency. So-called fourth-

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[4] Suffragette, Emily Wilding Davison tragically died after throwing herself in front of King George V's horse at the 1913 Epsom Derby.

wave feminism is said to be intersectional in outlook, yet an abundance of work already undertaken suggests that the most marginalised bodies are not gaining visibility within the BPM. Selfies can only fulfil their potential as 'political tools' in the 'recasting of the self' if they are circulated to achieve 'virality' (Ibrahim, 2020, p.3). Therefore, if black bodies are failing to be seen and shared on Instagram, hashtag feminism's tools are failing black bodies. This thesis analyses a body positive community, supposedly predicated, on raising awareness for body diversity. Being confronted with the presence of exclusionary forces abruptly influenced research direction. Accordingly, this chapter clarifies the thought processes behind how I arrived at a leading research objective. This was to chart the distribution of political activism and agency across different socio-demographics, with an onus on BWOC, through creation of a participant profile.

Another overarching research aim is to assess the way the body is utilised as a site of protest, specifically in partnership with the Instagram application. I make an original contribution to a continuum of feminist study into images of the female body. Instagram is regarded as the first SNS to prioritise photographic features, a status reflected through its synonymity with filters. Furthermore, my target population, #BodyPositive hashtaggers, organise into connective communities via visual interactions centred on the exchange of picture-based digital objects such as memes and selfies. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture & the Body,* Susan Bordo (2003, p.xiii) previously referred to this as an 'empire of images' through which the female body has to be understood:

> Constant, everywhere, no big deal. Like the water in the gold-fish bowl, barely noticed by inhabitants. Or noticed, but dismissed: "Eye Candy" – a harmless indulgence. They go down so easily, in and out, digested and forgotten. Hardly able anymore to rouse our indignation. Just pictures.

Following the advent of SNSs and their associated screen societies, images have taken on an ever more increased importance. Since Bordo's statement was made in 2003, women have become very much aware of what a 'big deal' the 'empire of images' plays in their lives (Bordo, 2003, p.xiii).

In 1971 work, *Good Enough to Eat*, feminist artist, Margaret Harrison depicted how women are disempowered through the daily 'violent' casual consumption of objectifying body imagery (See Fig. 3.1). Nowadays, the female body occupies a parallel social media life, in a leading 'produser' role (Bruns, 2008) as both, subject and creator (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017). Harding & Kirby (2009, p.183) deemed 2007 to be 'Year of the Fat Blog,' where 'some sort of Internet tipping point was achieved' and 'the fat-o-sphere was born.' I readjust focus through acknowledging that over the past decade, the 'photography activism' (Bogre, 2012) of fat feminism is being enacted on newer SNSs, such as Instagram. The female body continues to prominently feature within the feminist protest narrative, but in reconfigured guises, with imaging occupying an accelerating centrality to future iterations. The next section serves to set the scene by locating the female body within structures of feminist theory, to explore the hegemonic femininities virtual activism currently aims to dismantle.
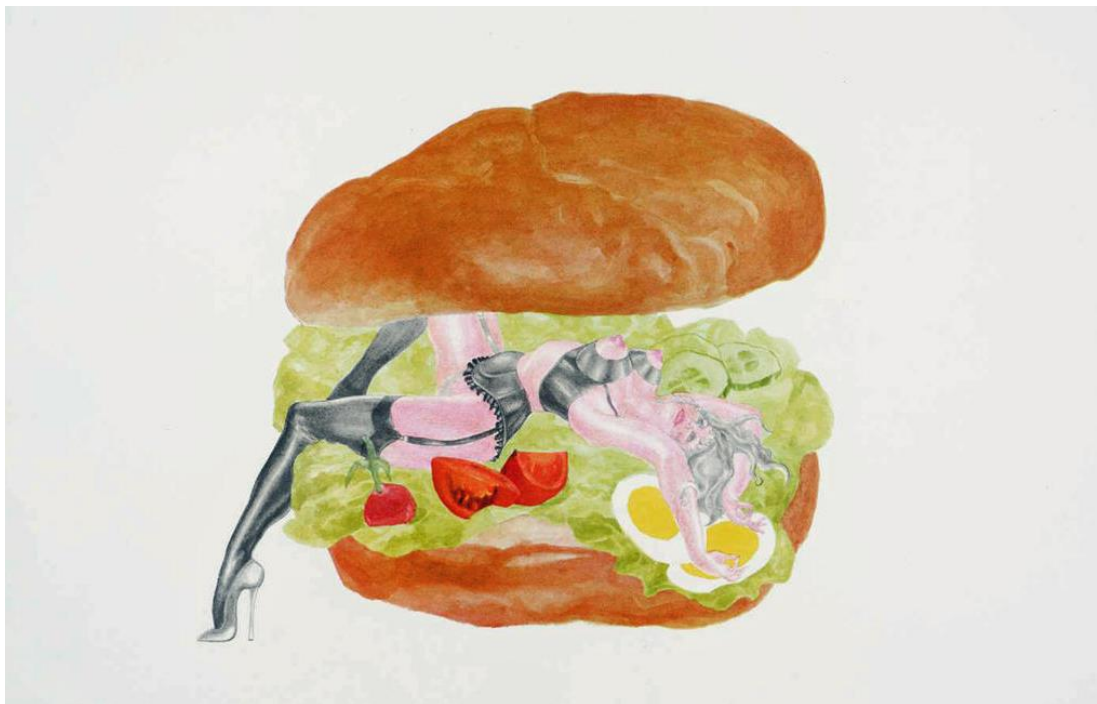
Figure 3.1

Good Enough to Eat – Margaret Harrison (1971)

Source: Tate Gallery (Ref: P06246)

The Body is a Cage

The body was first positioned as a protest site by some of the earliest feminist thinkers. The most notable of which is Mary Wollstonecraft in her seminal, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, originally published in 1792. Wollstonecraft describes the female condition as thus: 'Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison' (Wollstonecraft, 1891, pp.82-83). Instead of being biologically pre-disposed to beauty regimens, gendered aesthetical overemphasis *(*the gilt cage) is produced by patriarchal society (the prison), wherein women's appearance is honoured over intellectuality. Feminist social constructionists note that gendered ideological 'fictions, discourses and representations' have material effect on women's embodied realities (Jacobus, et al., 1990, p.2). In this case, Wollstonecraft (1891, pp.82-83) emphasises how a woman is not born in possession of 'feminine' traits, alternately behaviours associated with 'feminine' embodiment are 'taught' through social scripts. Theory follows therefore that what can be taught, can be untaught.

Anthropologist, Mary Douglas (1973, p.93) argues 'the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived.' Social constructionist feminism classifies the body as both, 'the problem and the solution' (Moss & Dyck, 2002, p.21). Oppressive discursive norms may be imposed upon the passive body, yet can also be resisted through active protesting bodies. The patriarchal organisation of societies asserts a dominant vision of 'femininity.' Nevertheless, 'feminine' behaviours are not fixed, instead, femininities are unstably subject to pluralistic reinterpretation. Feminist social constructionism sees the 'feminine' body's composition as an outcome of prevailing power relations. This perspective is important when analysing BPM content creation cycles to understand how feminist social change claims-making can be enacted through the reframing of 'feminine' expectations.

FAT DYKES STATEMENT

Don't assume I don't like my body.
Don't assume I think your body is better than mine.
Don't assume I think you're doing me a favour by having a relationship with me.
Don't assume I'm your earth mother/ diesel dyke.
Don't assume I'm a failed heterosexual.
Don't asume I'm always happy/jolly.
Don't assume I'm not sexual.
Don't assume I'm single.
Don't assume I'm unfit/unhealthy.
Don't assume my disabilities are
caused by being fat.
Don't assume I'm crazy/stupid.
Don't assume I want to lose weight.
Don't assume I want to talk about
slimming.
Don't assume I eat more than you do.
Don't assume I don't want to dance.
Don't assume you don't fancy me.
Don't assume you're not frightened of me.
Don't assume you look bettter than me
because you're thinner.
Don't assume your.e body won't change.

Figure 3.2

An excerpt from late 20th century Fat Women's News Conference Report

Source: Nettie Pollard Collection, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

Courtesy of Carlie Pendleton, with thanks.

Simone de Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex* (1949) was a landmark text that introduced the gendered body as a site of critical challenge and interrogation. de Beauvoir (1997, p.66) explicitly rejected the existence of a 'natural hierarchy' in arguing that 'woman is not a completed reality.' Most notably, de Beauvoir (1997, p.66) advocated how 'the body is not a thing, it is a situation' whereby female body narratives are subjectively constructed to serve overarching oppressor interests. To be 'truly feminine,' de Beauvoir (1997, p.24) denotes is to be 'frivolous, infantile, irresponsible' and ultimately, the 'submissive woman.' The body becomes instrumental to the enactment of gendered inequality.

Perhaps most importantly however, the body is also positioned as integral to overthrowing this sexist state: 'Women on the whole *are* today inferior to men; that is, their situation affords them fewer possibilities. The question is: should that state of affairs continue?' (de Beauvoir, 1997, p.24). In other words, Wollstonecraft's aforementioned 'gilt cage' is revealed to be a shifting social construct and therefore, subject to social change. I add to a continuum of critical investigation into how female bodily agency is constrained within patriarchal society. Moreover, my study integrates these conceptualisations of the body's recognised status as a site of feminist intervention.

Following this theoretical standpoint, the presence of activism and agency can be discerned wherever women critically question the 'feminine' body's subordinated societal position. By engaging with underlying BPM motivations, Instagram output can be considered as a contemporary contributor to a vibrant protest heritage where feminists have become agents for social change through visual re-representation. As outlined in Chapter One, this research accentuates the existence of a disconnect between feminist struggle for fat visibility, and coverage received in mainstream feminist scholarship.

Archival protest literature strongly suggests a lineage of fat feminist activism, that has sought to reject the sexism and sizeism channelled via gendered rituals of cosmetic self-maintenance. For example, during 1989, London Fat Women's Group (LFWG) arranged the National Fat Women's Conference where the *Fat Dyke's Statement* was authored (Pendleton, 2020, p.4). This shared values statement (See Fig. 3.2) is comprised from a series of defiant proclamations, including:

> Don't assume I don't like my body…
> Don't assume I'm a failed heterosexual…
> Don't assume I'm not sexual.
> Don't assume I'm single.
> Don't assume I'm unfit/healthy…
> Don't assume I want to lose weight.

> Don't assume I want to talk about slimming.
> (Printed in Smith, 1989, p.39)

This article of protest ephemera reads like a laundry list of fat gendered constructs being collectively opposed. Glassmeyer (2019, p.48) suggests that 21st century BPM activity is informed by this 20th century fat lesbian feminist provenance. I aim to investigate if a similar set of guiding political principles can be discerned within sporadic digital BPM image production. Informed by academic standpoints, I assess if there is evidence to suggest that BPM image events use the body, as a modality of resistance, to similarly circumvent projected oppressive narratives.

Weight Control as Social Control

Feminist literature (Dark, 2019) situates diet culture's tools of self-improvement, as tools of the patriarchy, on the basis that appearance-based body policing maintains a gendered fixation on weight reduction. Weight control is equated with patriarchal social control because through fatphobic prejudicial structures, women who refuse to conform with disciplinary discourses are either publicly ridiculed, or erased from the cultural landscape altogether (Goodman, 1995). Jenni Murray (2020) conveyed how tired 'fat cow' stereotyping, upheld by sexist societies, manifests through commonplace street harassment and unsolicited commentary. Fat discrimination is 'uncritically accepted,' meaning that weight non-conforming (WNC) women are subjected to 'implicit biases' because of their body size (McCullough Campbell, 2021, np).

From an early age, aspirational beauty codes signpost women towards understanding which 'feminine' characteristics are culturally privileged. The ideological parameters of 'girlhood' are socially regulated via 'normative' and 'deviant' categories of femininity (Ringrose, 2006, p.405). Female adipose tissue, or 'fat' as it is more commonly referred, is not innately negative. As Samantha Murray (2008, p.126) argues, attitudes towards fat aesthetics are 'not something spontaneously produced in a vacuum by the individual.' Instead, 'fatness' is contextually established. Accordingly, fat is alternately

legitimised, and vilified as socially deviant, in adherence to hegemonic power motives.

Figure 3.3

A Cadbury's Cocoa advertisement from 1907.

Feminine fatness is framed as non-threatening and conducive to health, in relation to young children.

Source: Evening Express (1907, p.4)

These interchangeable subjectivities are observable through how during infancy 'puppy fat' can be considered an indicator of 'thriving.' A fat-positive orientation continued into pre-pubescence, wherein, growing girls are encouraged to clean their plates. Witnessable in a 1907 advertisement (See Fig. 3.3) featuring a little girl, which reads: 'you know that it [Cadbury's cocoa] helps to keep their cheeks rosy and chubby, and their skin firm.' Here, feminine body fat is presented as cherub-like and adorable, when carried by young females. Feminist activists observed in a 1973 edition of *Spare Rib*:

> The girl's tendency towards a sweet tooth is fostered and encouraged by society. She learns that she is made of "sugar and spice and all

things nice". The confectionary industry offers her "Love Hearts",
"Dolly Mixtures" and "Fizzie Lizzies" (Phillips & Parker, 1973, p.32).

The protest piece thereafter critiques patriarchal society's sudden fixation on
feminine 'vital statistics' at the onset of womanhood, whereby psychological
pressures to 'be thinner than one's natural makeup' intensify (Phillips &
Parker, 1973, p.31).

Figure 3.4

A Lucky Strike advertisement from 1930.

Feminine fatness is framed as threatening and counterproductive to health, in relation to adult females.

Source: Stanford University (2021)

Physical maintenance becomes prioritised in adult women because once
sexually active, within patriarchal society, their social worth is derived from
heterosexual appeal. Comparatively, Figure 3.4 features a 1930 Lucky
Strike tobacco advertisement imploring women to avoid becoming their fatter
future self in 'five years from now' by 'reach[ing] for a Lucky instead'

whenever 'tempted to over-indulge.' With increasing seniority and independence, feminine fat bodies are subjected to relentless disciplinarian policing. Meltzer (2020, p.161) proclaims that the reason feminism and fat remain intertwined is because 'food and womanhood' will continue to crossover for as long as a woman's looks take precedence over any other component of her identity.

A feminist social constructionist framework appreciates that opportunities for female agency are compounded within patriarchal value systems. Archive literature provides valuable insight into how these oppressive structures are operationalised in the placement and patrolling of the female body. *Godey's Lady Book* was a conduct manual containing social etiquette pointers for elite women during the Victorian era. One edition admonishes the vulgarity of ladies who dared to 'load their plates' (Godey's quoted in Jacobs Brumberg, 1988, p.179). In other instances, feminine corpulence was further sanctioned through curt instruction to be 'frugal and plain in your tastes' (Godey's quoted in Jacobs Brumberg, 1988, p.179). Femininity was defined by bird-like appetites. This literature signals some of the earliest instances of fat-shaming. The female body was proactively suppressed - through denial of appetite and public space. Edwardian fat women suffering from the scourge of 'stoutness' were directed to disappear through wearing dark garments (*Weekly Mail*, 1909, p.3). From stoutness to today's 'globesity pandemic' (Gilman, 2010, p.174), idealisation of feminine thinness signifies an enduring beauty standard within the Western world. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (2005, p.238) monitors this through the success of Twiggy during the 1960s, who weighed approximately 6.5 stone, to Victoria Beckham's endorsement of the aspirational 'size zero' at the turn of the millennium.

Processes of sex-role stereotyping reinforce weight-watching as a 'normative discontent' (Rodin, et al., 1984, p.267) to the extent that the Common Sense Report (2015, p.5) on body image reveals over half of girls aged 6-8 years 'indicate their ideal body weight is thinner than their current weight.' Feminist theorists vindicate dominant discourses that assert expectations of normative

femininity, founded on self-scrutinisation and corrective remedial body work (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Chernin, 1994). Blood (2005, p.55) argues that it is imperative to acknowledge the 'discursive constitution' of the female body. This perspective is vital to analysis of how hashtaggers dismantle stigmatising body narratives, wherein empowerment is located in identity reclamation.

This standpoint was also adopted by earlier feminist philosophers; in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir (1997, p.23) argued that the placement of women into 'positions of inferiority' was reinforced through paternalistic social scripts, policing the body into obedience to preserve patriarchal order. Patriarchy is visually enacted through a 'phallocentric' order of silent females, reduced to non-expressive images for male heterosexual gratification (Mulvey, 1989, p.58). These governing linguistic structures are evidenced in one 1898 newspaper article entitled, *BEAUTY A DUTY*:

> Beauty is as much a duty of every woman as housekeeping, or very nearly as church-going. Pay no attention, girls and women, to the people who tell you it is "vain" to pay attention to your personal comeliness. That is not true! You owe it to your father, your brothers, (shall I whisper it? to your sweetheart), to your husband if you have one, to be pretty (*The North Wales Express*, 1898, p.3).

Beauty standards become stigmatising when a 'masque of femininity' is externally imposed, enlisting cosmetic criteria most women will 'fall short of' and are 'ultimately destined to transgress' (Tseëlon, 1992, p.89).

When women exist subserviently for the pleasure of men, the patriarchal placement of the body prioritises its 'pretty' outward projection, not its nourishment or wellbeing. Woolf (2013, p.281) notably termed this 'trap' the 'ministry of thin,' whereby through gendered social scripts, an insidious 'inner voice' is embedded declaring 'thinner is better.' Heyes (2007, p.75) further describes this as the 'real me' phenomenon, perpetuating the ideal that 'underneath every fat citizen is a thinner, healthier, more aesthetically pleasing' version just 'waiting to be revealed.' A gendered fatphobia illustrated through an 1868 British newspaper article entitled, *Fat Girls*:

> There is something imposing and awful in the Juno-like presence of a fat matron of 40. But feminine obesity must be consecrated by age or marriage to win either respect or toleration; and it is difficult to conceive of anything more pitiable than the lot of a young fat girl. Rightly or wrongly, our ideal of girlish beauty is formed on the sylph-like, delicate order, and consumption is preferable to embonpoint (*Brecon County Times*, 1868, p.2).

Before our screen societies, a fat female social position was often only selectively validated, following approval granted by a male authority figure. Female fatness continues to be 'ugly' and 'uninvited,' when pathologised by medicine and relentlessly purveyed as a 'self-improvement project' by the diet industry (Karakuş, 2018, p.353). Feminist thinkers, such as Sandra Lee Bartky (1988, pp.81-82), emphasise how approaches that align the 'feminine' physical body with 'power' encourage self-surveillance in 'obedience to patriarchy' accompanied by a 'perceived feeling of body deficiency.' Hester & Walters (2016, pp.189-190) claim this leaves female fatness 'out of step with time,' perpetually trapped in a 'conflicting temporality' between an imminent death, or striving to slim itself down.

The female fat body occupies an inferior and victimised status in a male-dominated world (Chernin, 1983). To quote de Beauvoir (1997, p.295): 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman… it is civilization [sic] as a whole that produces this creature.' A point emphasised by Sarah-Katherine Lewis (1995, np) in third-wave fat feminist zine, *Pasty*: 'In public we eat what we are given, no more. We feast in private. This is because we are women.' By aligning feminine fatness with negative attributes, such as laziness, Olufemi (2020, p.127) states that 'it signals to fat women and girls that their bodies exist as evidence of lack of education, due diligence and care.' Feminine fatness carries connotations of personal 'failure' at performing the female identity (Shugart, 2016, p.4), prompting Instagrammers to construct a counternarrative.

By adopting a feminist approach, I wish to make revaluated contributions in this area. Fatness is severely underrecognised as a legitimate state of embodiment. Feminine fat bodies are frequently only understood, when

binarised with thinness, as part of corrective imperatives. Lindo Bacon (2009, p.2) specifies: 'A fat body is a marker of a defective person.' A tendency readily evidenced through the Before-and-After imaging trope (See Fig 3.5), still in prevalent circulation. Sexism is served when fat femininity is feared because fulfilment of female appetite is conducive to women functioning at optimum productivity (Wolf, 1990, p.197). To quote Virginia Woolf (1928) in *A Room of One's Own*: 'One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well' (Woolf, 2000, p.20). I want to capture fat feminist perspectives, exceeding delimiting victim typologies, to appreciate the full breadth of female political activism and agency.

Figure 3.5

19th century examples of how fatphobia is manifest through cultural conditioning. Fat femininity is delegitimised as an undesirable source of shame (Before), when juxtaposed with aspirational slenderness (After).

Source: (Left) *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (1878, p.6)
(Below) *The Carmarthen Journal* (1892, p.7)
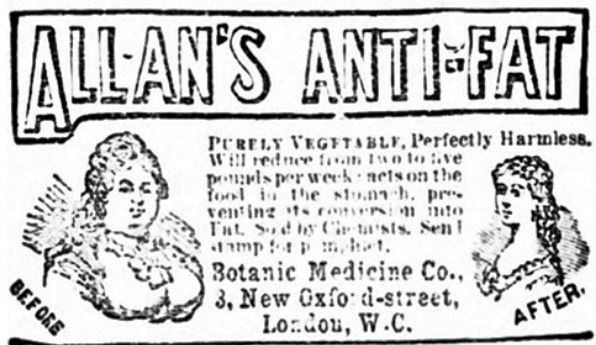
Gale (2015, p.313) notes that women's 'resolute presence' has been historically expressed through 'fugitive moments,' whereby performative bodies implore viewers to take a 'second look' at their existing attitudes. Hashtag feminists appear to be putting themselves in the picture, on their own terms, thanks to networked narrative agency. I recognise body positive hashtag feminism as an important phenomenon with respect to how fat identity is understood in conjunction with feminist movement membership. Female fatness has been mobilised as a deterrent by patriarchal society to

weaken women's ties to the feminist movement. In *Full Frontal Feminism*, Valenti (2007, p.8) contended: 'most women are feminists, but we're too afraid to say it – or even to recognise it. And why not? Feminists are supposed to be ugly. And fat. And hairy.' Across decades, fat stigma has been transmitted by male-centric media empires, through their dominant depiction of radical feminists, intended to incite 'dis-identification' (Scharff, 2009, p.1).

Figure 3.6

A mainstream depiction of the fat and hairy second-wave feminist stereotype, dated 13th September 1972.

Source: Punch Magazine Archive

© Arnold Roth 1972

For example, Figure 3.6 features a cartoon from *Punch Magazine* (1972) crassly epitomising the second-wave feminist stereotype. Women who had voice were villainised and vulgarised in calculated responses to the threat feminist agency posed to the existing order. A manipulative othering, deemed the 'dirtying' of feminist thought (Pivec, 2015, p.41). Historically, negative framings of fat female embodiment have been tactically deployed to disavow women's liberation protest in this way. Female fatness exists outside the boundaries of 'traditional' femininity. Subsequently, these masculine social scripts serve to ensure that the act of female protest becomes allied with 'deviant' characteristics in collective consciousness. Demonisation of fat identity has proved integral to undermining female political activism and agency, when fatphobia is mechanised to achieve

distance between the 'feminine' and a 'feminist' identity, and dissuade acquisition of gender equality.

Within sexist societies, fat women are 'expected' to perceive their bodies as being in a ceaseless state of transformation, where the flesh is reworked, to become 'normatively beautiful' (Murray, 2008, p.127). To attain this aspirational state called the 'beautiful life,' it is imperative women resist allegedly 'excessive desires' (Murray, 2008, p.127). In *Diners, Dudes & Diets*, Contois (2020, p.xiii) argues this is a 'feminine form of daily drudgery' where a 'political' consumer culture protects men from diet discourse. Patriarchal power relations are preserved when 'meat is masculine' and 'salad is feminine' because 'food is a battleground' (Contois, 2020, p.2). A toxic masculinity dominates typified by a 'big appetite' and consumption of high-fat hearty fare (Contois, 2020, p.2). Whereas women literally become the 'weaker sex' through ideals founded in appetite suppression. Feminist literature has remained critical of the 'sexual politics' surrounding meat-eating (Adams, 1990) where fried chicken, ribs and burgers are labelled 'dude food' (Contois, 2020, p.19) while femininities are characterised through low calorific intake. Early 20th century advertisements for obesity 'cures' single out 'faults of figure' made visible through the 'superfluous flesh' of a 'double chin' (See Fig. 3.7). Through mainstream media imaging, fat is targeted for cosmetic obliteration in pursuit of 'The Woman Beautiful.' Dominant discourse presents the route to woman's self-actualisation – 'the better self' - as exclusively achievable via deprivation, detox, diet and discipline (Moseley, 2019).

In comparison, fat has received very little coverage as a stable identity, or facet of political expression. This is despite a longstanding 'close entanglement between creativity and protest' within underground feminist 'artivism' countercultures advancing fatness as a political concern (Wiedlack, 2013, p.17). Artistic production has served as a vehicle for deliberate denial to conform with these beautifying codes. As observed through the joyful ambivalence voiced by all-female British punk band, The Gymslips on their track, *Renees* (1983):

Double chin and short cropped hair
Always take the piss we really don't care
George's pie 'n' mash is what we like to eat
We go to Chan's for a special treat
Get drunk, get smashed, get pissed, get fat.

My study responds to calls from Mahmood (2005) to apply a broadened perspective when understanding different modalities of agency. One that dissociates political female agency from the 'politically prescriptive project of feminism' and relocates it in everyday acts of performative resistance (Mahmood, 2005, p.153).

You can make the double chin subs'de into natural graceful lines, and get rid of the superfluous flesh about the throat, shoulders, and all other parts. Antipon does this splendid rebeautifying work speedily and harmlessly.

THE WOMAN BEAUTIFUL.

Faults of Figure due to Over-Stoutness are Permanently Removed by the Famous Antipon Treatment.

Figure 3.7

An advertisement from 1910 for anti-obesity treatment, Antipon using imagery to problematise physical attributes, such as the 'double chin' posed next to an aspirational thin 'woman beautiful.'

Source: The Flintshire Observer (1910, p.3)

Butler (1993; 1997) argues agency is in performativity, in the 'radical rearticulation' of symbolic norms that serve as obstacles to gender equality (Butler, 1993, p.23). The BPM's connective action presents an instance of subversive performativity against what Wolf (1990, p.187) defines as the 'great weight shift.' This is a term used to depict the disciplinary discourses of diet culture designed to stunt the 'threat' of female agency. Wolf (1990, p.187) outlines how: '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.' A patriarchal society is served by instilling a cultural fixation with weight-watching rather than women locating more meaningful forms of empowerment, such as increased reproductive and monetary freedoms. A landmark publication in this regard is *The Beauty Myth* (1990) written by Wolf, wherein 'beauty' is conceptualised as a mechanism of control. A UK-government report found that over 60% of girls avoid certain activities because they 'feel bad about their looks' (Bates, 2014, p.193). These statistics convey how beauty standards serve to temper the agency of women by confining them to a status of passive objects, instead of active political subjects.

Across sources, gender stereotyping surfaced as a key barrier to female agency. The Fawcett Society's (2020, p.31) report on gender stereotyping in early childhood isolated the overbearing presence they pose to girls' potential. Findings revealed that 36% of 7-10-year-old girls were 'made to feel their looks are their most important attribute' (Fawcett Society, 2020, p.31). It remains unfounded whether BPM virtual routines are most accurately defined as acts of self-empowerment, or self-objectification. This is a pressing line of critical enquiry following publication of the Curate Escape Report (2019). The study questioned 2,189 British young people between the ages of 11 and 24 years about body confidence and social media. The results pinpointed the presence of gendered stressors when 74% of females said they felt pressured to 'look their best' online, compared with less than half (47%) of males (Curate Escape Report, 2019, p.4).
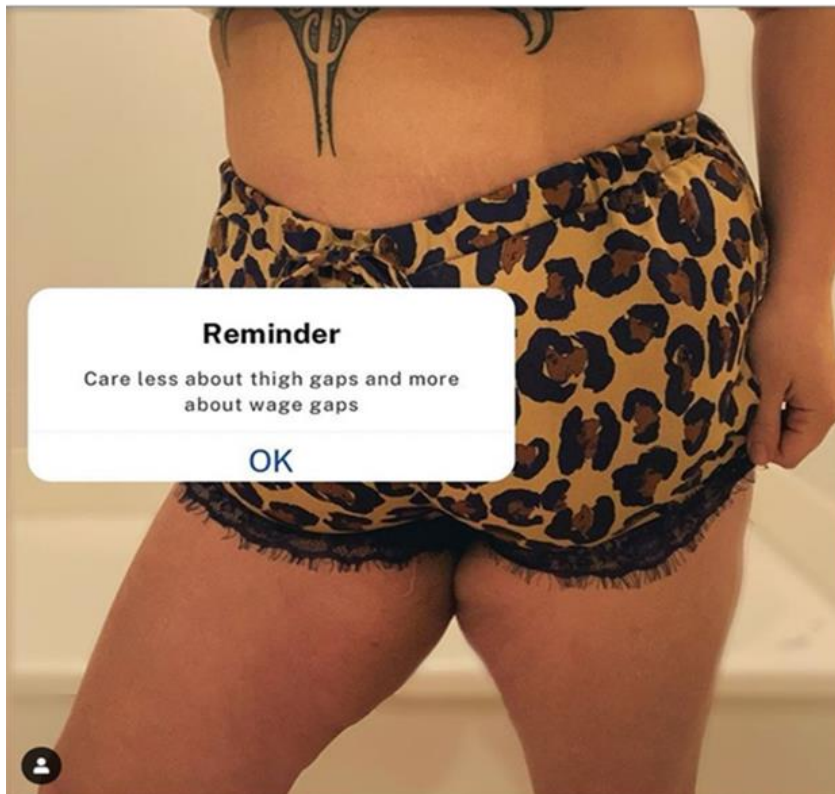
Figure 3.8

A body positive selfie signalling Instagram's potentiality as a 'protest site,' in accordance with critical feminist theory.

Source: ohheyimkayla (2020)

Printed with written permission.

Parallels can be drawn between Wolf's (1990) critical feminist orientation and current BPM knowledge production patterns. Some BoPo Warriors make direct reference to how body shape self-surveillance is used to deflect attentions from more meaningful quality-of-life gains. For instance, Figure 3.8 features an Instagram post imploring women to 'care less about thigh gaps[5] and more about wage gaps' with a view to redress this gendered state of aesthetic fixation. In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz (1994, p.14) explained how the patriarchal world order is sustained when appearance orientation is encouraged 'by connecting women much more closely than men to the body.' Mulvey (1989, p.62) described this tendency towards female agency being primarily derived from 'erotic impact' as a superficial overemphasis on 'looked-about-ness.' However, there is no hashtag 'feminism' without radical thought; without the presence of radical thought, these behaviours are simply hashtagging. This project amasses a qualitative evidence base to expand insight into the hashtag's role in resistance.

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[5] A thigh gap is an aspirational Western beauty standard requiring that a woman's thighs do not touch.

Corcoran (2010, p.1) necessitates that 'political' actions 'involve forms of innovation that tear bodies from their assigned places.' In the critical context, imparted by feminist literature, BPM hashtaggers seem to be asserting an alternative worldview, through their collective rejection of reductive and disciplinary diet culture discourses. A challenge in keeping with Wolf's notion of female emancipation:

> You do not win by struggling to the top of a caste system, you win by refusing to be trapped within one at all. The woman wins who calls herself beautiful and challenges the world to really see her (Wolf 1990, p.290).

Wolf (1990) conceptualised women as autonomous agents in relation to their body narratives. BPM Instagrammers appear to be exercising agency through the reclamation of fat feminine identity. The world is challenged to see visible belly outlines (VBOs) and cellulite, via cyber cultural transmission. A rhetoric of dissent observable in Nicole Byer's (2020), *#veryfat #verybrave: The Fat Girl's Guide to Being #brave and Not a Dejected, Melancholy, Down-In-The-Dumps Weeping Fat Girl in a Bikini*:

> I wanted to write a book about fat ladies – because I am one. Not curvy, not plus-size, not big-boned, not fluffy, not phat. I'm FAT. I am a fat lady who loves wearing bikinis. Which is #verybrave in our culture today. I realized [sic] this was #brave when I saw other fat women posting pictures in bikinis on Instagram, and people in the comments section went wild and were using that word: "brave" (Byer, 2020, pp.vii-viii).

To take positive ownership of a fat female body is a 'brave' act of rebellion in the Western world. A society where women receive positive reinforcement for weight reduction (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008, p.238) and cruelty towards fat persons remains a form of social injustice still pardoned as 'culturally acceptable' (West, 2016, p.148).

Beauty rituals associated with 'femininity' such as liposuction and fitness regimes are directed to censor, control and constrict the female body from taking up space (Bordo, 1993, p.105). Ringrose & Regehr (2020, p.247) interviewed women, such as Alexandra, who detailed the 'fatigue' experienced from repetitive subjection to unrealistic mediations: 'I am just a normal person, I don't have access to the surgery, the diet, the personal

chef, or the workout thing. It's just exhausting being a woman, honestly.' On public SNSs, women can build visual counternarratives to public advertising images. I intend to test if BPM images are composed as a proactive strategy against this gendered trauma. For example, in *Fat! So?*, activist, Marilyn Wann (1998, p.184) urges people to become 'flabulous,' an agentic state achieved by refusing to apologise for your size. I rectify a knowledge gap by documenting the way these defiant attitudes and behaviours are being disseminated on SNSs.

In addition, Susie Orbach represents another leading feminist scholar following the 1978 publication of landmark text, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*. Her work generally acknowledged how the female body has been manipulated by longstanding sexist world orders. However, Orbach did not simply present women as passive receptors of social determinants. Instead, she too described the body as an entity submerged in a multitude of subjective social meanings. Her stance emphasised how there is no fixed mono definition of the female body, nor of 'fat' for that matter. In the words of Orbach (2006, p.251): 'slimness is not a panacea, it was just sold to you as such.' Orbach's work highlights how fatness is being propositioned to womankind as a 'revolting' attribute, yet this negative social script reflects just one social position on offer. A key shortcoming of her theory resides with its lack of applicability to real-life unfolding instances of activism, whereby fat is enacted as a political identity and facet of feminist protest. This is an oversight my fieldwork readdresses with the support of an empirical case study.

Feminist theory introduces a flexible classification of 'political life,' exemplified by Lewis & Hemmings (2019, p.405), who indicated political consciousness can be exercised at the kitchen table, demonstrations, conferences or on the written page. By engaging in digital protest study, my own feminist research dynamically recognises that the 'written page' now extends to internet profile pages. In addition, classical notions under appreciate that the body itself can be instrumental as a social change mechanism. Detached from traditional trappings of chambers and the

corridors of power, feminist embodied resistance is used to make political statements by positioning bodies in scenarios that refuse to comply with misogynistic mechanisms. BPM Instagrammers demonstrate against patriarchal separation from their own bodies by defiantly self-displaying them without keeping them covered up as sources of shame.

I answer calls from activist-sociologist, Barbara Sutton (2007, p.154) to recognise what she termed the 'feminization [sic] of resistance':

> Bodies need to be taken into account in order to understand political resistance. Activist bodies are the vehicles of political protest; they express needs rooted in the body's materiality; they can be deployed as symbols; and they convey power when joined with other bodies.

Through self-shooting photography, BPM Instagrammers reject gendered social conditioning, such as 'the tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1983). A term used to describe the cultural imperative that women 'must' maintain a slim state through diet and exercise regimes (Lloyd, 1996, p.79). *Landwhale*, written by Jes Baker (2018), proves useful in describing what the BPM does from the primary perspective of a participating subject. She defines body positive spaces as being 'typically on the internet, where we're able to find others who will talk about fatness in a neutral or affirming way' (Baker, 2018, p.236). Their protest intends to achieve enhanced public exposure to non-hegemonic gendered bodily representations and in turn, enhance their social acceptability (Caldeira, et al., 2018a, p.37). This is a movement aim reiterated in Baker's memoir, *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls: A Handbook to Unapologetic Living* (2015) in which she implores activists to fight fatphobia with the political agency proffered by smartphone ownership and SNSs: 'Call out photoshopping for the insidious scoundrel it is, reclaim your body by creating your own narratives through selfies, and then share the shit out of the images and flood the world with unaltered beauty' (Baker, 2015, p.104).

O'Keefe (2011, p.1) recognises how flaunting provides the 'subversive capabilities' to re-appropriate positions of femininity propounded by existing gendered tropes. This section has retrospectively explored how fat female

identities have been presented as subordinate, while introducing the ways hashtaggers utilise new media to subvert stigmatising stereotypes. I intend to expand existing understanding by analysing emerging 'fat-affirmative' responses, as part of an alleged fourth-wave of hashtag feminism (Murray, 2008, p.129).

Fat is a Race Issue

Sutton (2007, p.152) argues that an appreciation of social context is crucial to understanding if 'women's embodied practices have a transgressive effect or not.' To establish whether BPM Instagrammers purposefully weaponise their 'performative bodies' (Lin, 2019, p.863), as feminist sites of re-inscription (Renold & Ringrose, 2008), an examination of discriminative ideologies needs to first be provided. By locating historic bodily depictions within existing literature, a critically informed dialogue can ensue as to if the BPM subverts, or supports, the status quo through their Instagram output. Ford (2008, p.1096) advises that it is important for feminists to appreciate 'racial identity development,' to assess how the gendered body differs from the 'White hegemonic paradigm.' A line of enquiry focused on WOC was encouraged by recent work. Gail Lewis (2020, p.7) stresses that the racialised quality underlying black feminism diverges from 'dominance feminism,' with its universalising white worldview. Or as she previously put it, the 'thick, suffocating fog of whiteness in feminism' (Lewis & Hemmings, 2019, p.405).

Fourth-wave feminism is said to be operationalised from an intersectional protest perspective. One which is receptive to the complex struggles navigated by multifaceted identities. An intersectional framework recognises that in the Western world, thin privilege is bestowed upon women who take up as little space as possible. Social scripts condition the collective consciousness towards prizing thinness as the 'pinnacle' of feminine attainment. To be slight, slim, skinny and svelte is rewarded through beauty pageantry and incentivised via 'anti-fat bias' endemic in cultural texts celebrating weight reduction (Peltier & Mizock, 2012, p.93). Fat feminine

embodied existence, on the other hand, is exposed to a different set of challenges and pressures. Moreover, this 'variation of experiences' shifts again in accordance with identity-based privileges when gender and size are allied with skin colour (Williams, 2017).

In *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness*, Harrison (2021) states that to inhabit a fat black identity is to lead a subjugated existence. Body surveillant societal scripts are intensified from state institutions, such as the police, plus this population are often medically misdiagnosed and overlooked in housing provision. Class disparities also impact on life chances, Ailshire & House (2011, p.397) found that BWOC from 'low-educated' and 'low-income' categories experienced the greatest growth in body mass index (BMI). Comparatively, 'high-educated' and 'high-income' white men experienced the least (Ailshire & House, 2011, p.397).

The fat, poor, black woman represents a historically stigmatised figure regularly subjected to oppressive fatphobic societal structures. An injustice imposed based on associations of colonialist savagery and racialised inferiority (Strings, 2019, p.93). When approaching analysis of digital knowledge production structures, Sobande (2021, p.131) necessitates the need to appreciate how 'computer-generated imagery' (CGI) is informed by preceding power relations. With regards to the representation of blackness, Sobande (2021, p.131) proposes that black embodiment is understood in 'connection to centuries of white supremacy.'

According to O'Keefe (2011, p.7): 'the body is very much a contextualised product of the relationship between capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism and other systems of oppression.' For centuries, the black female anatomy has been framed from a white male worldview, one which Griffin (2014, p.182) describes as 'glaring at the Black female body through the White gaze.' Mitchell (2020) called for recognition of racial ventriloquism, where black bodies have been used in cultural production to fulfil the colonial fantasies of the powerful. In comparison, Instagrammers engage in identity-based reclamations of self, where opportunities are provided for WOC to

perform fat identities that challenge tired racial tropes. For example, black feminine fatness has been commonly framed through 'the mammy' stereotype (See Fig. 3.9). The mammy presents a narrow and derogative mediation of black womanhood; a racialised caricature who is 'frumpily' desexualised, and whose opportunities for agency are reduced to being a 'natural workhorse' and 'comfortably subservient' (Harris, 2015, p.5).

Figure 3.9

'The Mammy' is caricatured in this mainstream depiction of black fat female identity from 1919.

Source: The Washington Times (1919, p.15)

Concentrated elites of powerful primary definers have historically externally ascribed body narratives on to the identities of WOC; an ascription imposed through the reportage of privileged white male journalists. A British newspaper article from 1893 serves to highlight how anti-fat subordinating social scripts are continually intertwined with gendered racial difference:

> Here in Europe, and England generally, are *our* ladies sighing to be slim, whilst from over the ocean come the moans of black and copper-coloured sisters who long to be fat. Corpulency is with them a beauty, and the fat woman is the belle of the ball! But these opposite degrees

of taste have, in *our* case, more than the caprice of fashion to back them, for everyone knows that obesity is a disease by which the person afflicted suffers most acutely, not only physically, but mentally (*The Western Mail*, 1893, p.8).

In Western beauty standards, Mattias de Vries (2012, p.58) observes that 'only a distinct minority qualifies as "truly" feminine… this is defined as white, middle class, heterosexual and in contrast to all "others."' It was only by locating black bodies in their historic narratives of exclusion that any adversarial attributes of BPM activism could be understood.

Female empowerment is discussed (Takhar, 2013) as being identifiable in a woman's ability to take control of her own life. Instagram activists currently receive little coverage in academic study. However, mainstream media texts such as magazine think-pieces written by them, suggest critical editorial control is present:

> Stop casting us as slaves, maids and the depressed characters down on their luck. Listen to us when we talk about the injustices within representation and inclusivity. We all deserve to feel seen, wanted and secure in our bodies (Yeboah, 2020b, p.31).

Aligned with Yeboah's user perspective, cyber citizen channels pose great potential for empowerment and social change through the transmission of alternate embodied realities. Nonetheless, Dabiri (2019) stresses the importance of adopting a retrospective angle in *Don't Touch My Hair*. Cultural customs of the past inform those of the present day, including established cosmetic indicators of aesthetic social 'worth.' Dabiri's (2019, p.29) work explores how 'black hair' became 'political,' following the delegitimisation of African physical features, in accordance with racist values:

> Understanding our past makes it easier for us to identify the future we want to create. So much of what we are conditioned to believe is "natural" is not. Certainly, it is not universal, nor "just the way things are." We have choices in what we collectively recognize [sic] as valuable. For me, great possibilities exist in my recognition that the society I live in was designed with exclusion in mind (Dabiri, 2019, p.177).

These perspectives on black female bodies accentuate how appearance standards act as reflections of prevailing racial power dynamics. Evans-Winters (2019, np) states that black female activists have had to develop

'strategies of resistance' in the fight against gender and racial inequality
'synchronously.'

An intersectional lens engages with the simultaneous oppressive stressors of
sexism and racism (Ringrose & Regehr, 2020). Fat acceptance activist,
Nancy Roberts explains this dual discrimination faced by fat WOC:

> There is no other characteristic – other than skin colour – which
> causes so much discrimination. You feel so isolated because people
> think of you as some kind of freak. They talk to you slowly because
> they think you will not understand. You are supposedly unhappy if
> you are fat – you *cannot* be sexy – and some people even say our
> weight is 'disgusting'. But it is not an obscenity, it is just another way
> that people look (Roberts quoted in Dowdeswell, 1983, p.79).

The existence of this duplicity of discrimination warranted enhanced scrutiny
into the mediatory role blackness plays in BPM protest participation. This is
important work given that fat black women continue to be stigmatised as
'obese' and a 'social dead weight,' through persistent summoning of the
'diseased black woman' allegory, historically relied upon to maintain racial
division (Strings, 2015, p.107).

Intersectional awareness is crucial to comprehending how agency is
distributed within the #BodyPositive network. Olufemi (2020, p.7) argues
intersectionality can serve as a 'meaningful framework' to aid in the exposure
of 'a matrix of domination,' as opposed to superficially being a 'vehicle for the
laundry list of our identities.' Research development was informed by this
need to construct a dynamic design to capture both, individualist position
statements, and closed socio-demographic data quantifying ethnic
community engagement. Fat activist, Virgie Tovar (2020, pp.95-96)
reiterates the theory's crucial role in the decolonisation of black bodies:

> When you are a person of color [sic], there is an extra layer of racism
> that creates shame around our skin, our hair, our body shape, or the
> way we talk. If you have other qualities that are marginalized [sic] –
> like you're queer, trans, fat or disabled – those are extra layers on top
> of race and gender.

It was imperative to re-centre such voices because as Pinkston (2020, p.xii)
advocates: 'Black girls share a different experience because our story

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involves an added layer of colorism [sic].' The addition of an intersectional lens acknowledges that experiences of embodied resistance vary in accordance with the colour of the flesh being displayed (Kwakye & Ogunbiyi, 2019). A colonial past, characterised by oppression and inequality, manipulates how naked black bodies are understood in the field of protest (DeLap, 2020).

In *Fat Girls in Black Bodies: Creating Communities of Our Own*, Joy Cox (2020, p.9) argues 'people in larger bodies earn less than those who are smaller.' Weight stigma manifests through prospective employer's default alignment of fatness with laziness and a skill shortage. Plus, physicians can withhold treatment on the grounds of obesity. Cox's (2020) work traces how fatphobic social injustice increases in accordance with the darkening of skin colour. Cox (2020, p.9) voices: 'adding what it means to be Black and womxn [sic] to this context, there is added oppression intersecting across identities.' Existing literature has suggested the occurrence of racial exclusion extends into social media networks. Williams (2017) explains that the Fat People of Color [sic] Tumblr page was set up in response to how POC were often excluded from fat activism, as an outcome of thin and white privilege. I build upon this work by deducing whether black female bodies encounter the same exclusionary treatment when engaging in performative protest within current Instagram networks.

The interrelationship between fat shaming and racial stigma has been termed the 'double burden' black women sustain (St Jean & Feagin, 2015, p.111). Respectively, white societies have systemically implemented fatness, and its associations with 'laziness' and 'lack of self-control,' to assert labels of degradation and domination (St Jean & Feagin, 2015, p.111). Around the turn of the 20th century, fat was routinely used as a 'marker' to depict 'the less civilised body' (Erdman Farrell, 2011, p.75), a discursive denigration disproportionately levelled at ethnic populations. Fatphobic frameworks intersected with ethnicity, when blackness was aligned with gluttony, disease and 'improper' body conduct in Western society (Strings, 2019, pp.187-191). This literature therefore presents fat as not only a

feminist issue, but a race issue, where WOC have been inordinately impacted.

Literature suggests that BWOC want empowering definitions of black feminine fatness of their own volition, given that patriarchal sexist and colonial structures have denied opportunities for independent identity formation. BWOC, such as Nichols (1984, p.18), wanted to perform female fatness in a lesser documented yet revolutionary way: 'It's better to die in the flesh of hope than to live in the slimness of despair.' Feminist educators however proclaim that the agency of fat black women is controlled and suppressed under distorting stereotypes (Nicol, 2012, p.89). In *Fat on Film* (2020), Barbara Plotz vindicates contemporary Hollywood cinema for perpetuating demeaning labels, such as the 'Sapphire' caricature, depicting fat black women as sassy and over-bearing. I acknowledge how technological innovation has enabled the co-construction of body narratives. There is a data deficit when it comes to qualitatively assessing if BWOC are capitalising on newfound opportunities to subversively perform body politics, as part of the BPM.

A subject-centred dialogue is required because increased public exposure to black female fatness alone cannot necessarily be equated with emancipatory outcomes. For example, fat femininity has been racialised through tenacious regurgitation of the 'Jezebel' stereotype, fetishising black bodies (See Fig. 3.10). Stephens & Philips (2003, p.8) describe the Jezebel as a 'young, exotic, promiscuous, over-sexed woman who uses her sexuality' to assert a dehumanised agency. Shaw (2006, p.50) observes how fat black female bodies particularly are routinely hyper-sexualised. A circumscribed status achieved through delimiting projections, that assume an underlying 'voracious appetite' of 'eternal' hunger to be matched by an accompanying 'unquenchable sexual appetite' (Shaw, 2006, p.50). Fuentes (2012) charts the origin of the Jezebel to colonial contexts. Black bodies were subjected to this framing because it removed 'the onus of power and responsibility from the white male perpetrators' sexually assaulting enslaved women (Fuentes, 2012, p.149).

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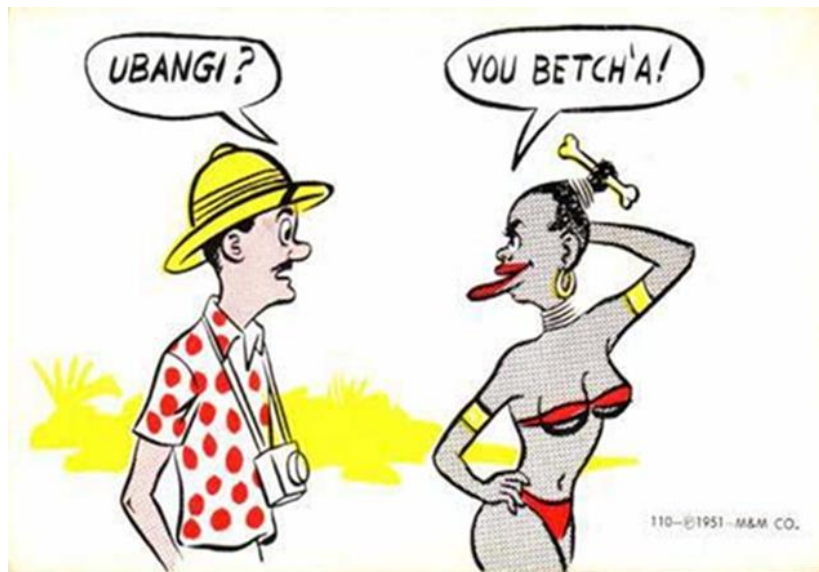
Figure 3.10

A 1951 portrayal of 'The Jezebel,' whereby body fat is distributed in dimensions to serve male sexual gratification.

Source: State University's Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia

Moreover, Bryant (1982, p.119) contends that ideas surrounding the black male as an uber virile and well-endowed 'sexual dynamo' have become inappropriately culturally enshrined. My focus on the sexualisation of BWOC is however justified on the basis that when coupled with fatness - a leading research preoccupation - the Jezebel racial stereotype becomes exaggerated. In her discussion of appearance ideals, Ford (2006, p.173) explains that whereas white women 'can't be fat,' black women 'can have a little meat' on their bones. Fatty tissue becomes selectively legitimised when confined to zones routinely sexualised to cater for the male gaze. This is a subjective process termed the 'thickening' of black female bodies (Friedman, et al., 2019), where regions such as the breasts, buttocks and thighs are magnified to enhance patriarchal pleasure. A racialised objectification responsible for inducing anxiety in WOC, who experience bodily dissatisfaction from the pressure to conform to 'body standards of thickness' (Hughes, 2020, np).

Misogynoir describes the way racist and sexist sentiment intertwine in the oppression of black women (Bailey & Trudy, 2018, p.762). In *Too Fat, Too Slutty, Too Loud: The Rise & Reign of the Unruly Woman*, Petersen (2017, p.77) critiqued the default delineation of black fat visibility with increased bodily autonomy. Using the example of feminine fat representation in hip hop, Petersen (2017, p.77) claims WOC are still denied agency, as the genre

is aesthetically fixated with the sexualisation of big buttocks. Therefore, mass coverage of these 'slim-thick' ideals (Ringrose, et al., 2019, p.80) stands far from revolutionary, in its continued service to the male gaze. These racialised stereotypes have left a legacy of enhanced body shame and stigmatisation. An original contribution to knowledge is made by demanding direct dialogues are established with WOC to comprehend if SNSs grant agentic spaces to critically develop alternative relationships with their bodies.

Figure 3.11

1916 Cosmetics Advertisement

In Western standards, beauty is explicitly aligned with the pursuit of 'whiteness.'

Source: South Wales Weekly Post (1916, p.5)

Black bodies have been excessively subjected to narrow beauty standards, on the basis that social norms have historically correlated whiteness with 'purity, goodness and beauty' and blackness with 'unattractiveness' (Strings, 2019, p.53). Beauty ideals have continued to be whitewashed throughout the ages; as overtly evidenced in a 1916 advertisement for Créme Simon, which 'all the most beautiful women use… for beauty, whiteness, preservation, of the skin' (See Fig. 3.11). In Western society, cultural

artefacts present 'whiteness' and 'beauty' as interchangeable descriptors. This has implications for the 'women we see' and the women we do not see in public spaces, for example, only 40% of black Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women feel 'people like them are represented' in London advertising (Ringrose & Regehr, 2017, p.18). By embarking on data collection, I discern whether with digital tools, BoPo Warriors can decolonise black bodies from centuries-old white hegemonic beauty ideologies.

The literature provided supporting evidence that Caucasian-centric cultural codes continue to infiltrate contemporary aspirational body ideologies. Thomas (2020, np) carries critical conversation into the present day, pinpointing how 'skin-colour hierarchies' are perpetuated through body comportment corrective rituals, such as skin lightening. WOC are often subjected to individualist blame narratives directed at their 'faulty behaviours and bodies' to explain away racist structures (Casper & Moore, 2009, p.77). Dominant discourses do not place onus on fostering inclusion, but encourage corrective assimilatory behaviours. Leah Vernon (2019, np), a published BPM advocate, describes her journey from self-scrutiny and loathing, to becoming an outspoken celebratory 'fat unicorn.' However, in *Unashamed: Musings of a Fat, Black Muslim*, Vernon (2019, np) voiced frustration at her body being treated like a reparative project:

> Your lips are too big, but big is okay for a white girl whose lips are poked and injected. Your hair is too nappy; just perm it or put on a blonde wig so that you resemble a white girl.

Valuable first-person dialogue provided by WOC drew attention to the unrelenting prevalence of racialised double standards, in relation to body ideals. A knowledge gap remains regarding whether BPM hashtag feminism strives to dismantle this discriminative social order. Past and present-day perspectives, encountered in the literature, reinforced my academic rationale to document how political activism and agency are distributed across participating ethnic demographics within the hashtagging community. Especially, since Yeboah (2020a, p.31) contends that the BPM's lineage is orientated in the efforts of 'Black plus-size women,' as 'an offshoot of the fat acceptance movement.' Consultation with retrospective accounts has

prompted the need to explore if there is a place for black bodies in hashtag feminism.

A Movement of White Women?

Informed by archive and academic materials, the previous section examined how WOC are disproportionally subjected to weight stigma. The BPM advocate in the interests of body diversity and inclusion. An established, and much espoused, movement mantra is: 'All bodies are good bodies' and group sentiment endorses amplification of marginalised bodies (See Fig. 3.12). The following section nevertheless draws attention to a contradiction between the virtual performance and the reality of body positivity. A key research aim is to produce a participant profile, with an emphasis on ethnic identifiers. This aim has been developed in direct relation to multiple sources critiquing the BPM's supposedly intersectional orientation.
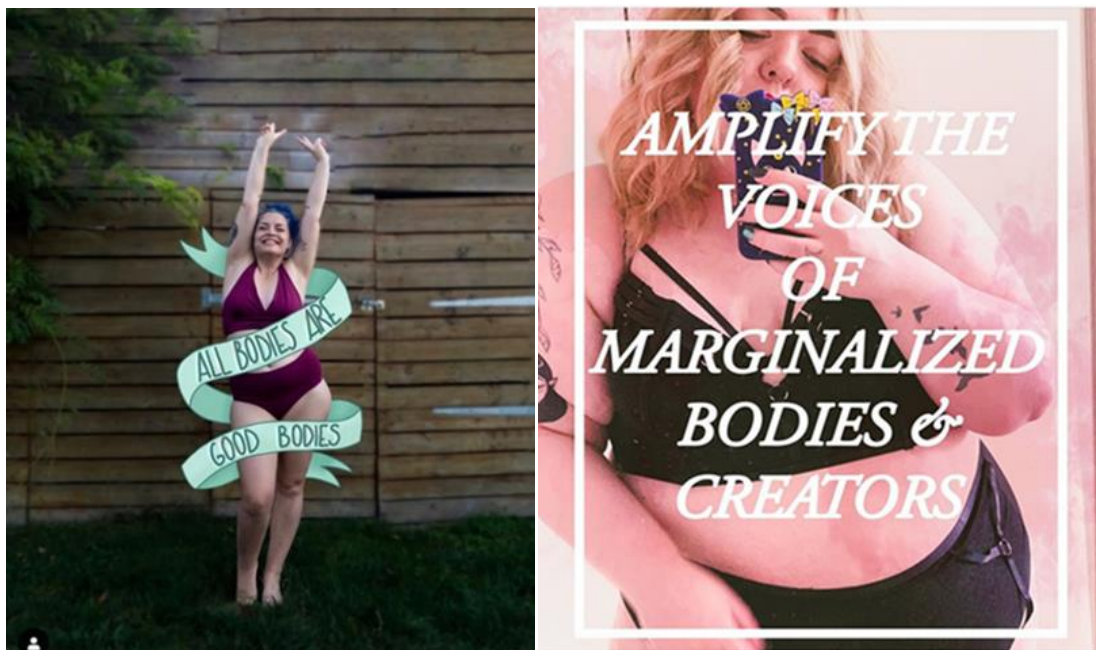
Figure 3.12

Body positive Instagram selfies implying an inclusive and intersectional collective stance.

Source: (Left) lunefulle (2020) (Right) juxtaposing.jess (2020)
          Printed with written permission.

For instance, Manfredi (2019, p.1) observes it is now commonplace for BPM advocates to be 'able-bodied, white women who are a size 12.' Such commentaries apolitically align BoPo Warriors more readily with heteronormative beauty codes. To the extent that Johansson (2020, p.140) demands the BPM requires 'repoliticising,' since white privilege and supremacy have led to assimilation with neoliberal discourse. A reality removed from the purported protest output of 'disruptive technologies,' adopted in a radical performative politics against colourism and sizeism.

Contrary to the BPM's publicly transmitted sentiment, the small selection of research already undertaken into this fledgling movement, suggests that the bodies who are most in need of elevation fail to achieve visibility. Activist, Stephanie Yeboah (2017, np) disputes:

> The truth is, body positivity is for white women. White female bodies being safe is paramount to maintaining white supremacy. Accordingly, white female feminists who claim to be here for all women, play favourites with whose bodies they covet and uphold.

These critical standpoints question the BPM's viability when it comes to being conceptualised as a 'social movement.' Feminist writers (Walker, 2020, p.17) define activism as being 'founded on rebellion,' where to be an 'activist' one is required to reject an existing world order and demand social change. If the BPM only replicates exclusionary mainstream beauty standards, then the movement appears to be reproducing, rather than resisting, oppressive social dynamics. I acknowledge the need to generate an evidence base to substantiate these perceived patterns of privilege.

The BPM has been implicated in whitewashing claims and challenged regarding its lack of intersectional awareness (Otis, 2017, p.3). It is important to assess how black body politics are positioned within so-called 'fourth-wave' feminism; especially following previous discussions documenting the exclusion of WOC from earlier cycles of feminist protest. Okolosie (2018, p.ix) writes about the retrospective erasure of black British female protest from the mainstream feminist narrative arc:

> History, more often than not, tells us the story of the powerful. It is the details behind their victories that are amplified and given room within the national consciousness to become words like "fact" and "truth". Such objectivity, we know, is merely a form of subterfuge hiding those other stories that could be told of marginalised voices forced into positions of silence and obscurity.

These networked instances add to an exclusionary provenance, in which feminism stands accused of situating the embodiment of black femininity as 'other,' or 'outside' the campaign for gender equality (Olufemi, 2020, p.12). There is a data deficit regarding whether racial difference continues to pose a barrier to protest participation within hashtag feminism.

Second-wave feminist, Sheila Rowbotham (1971, p.6) implores historians to consider academic amplification of those omitted:

> The revolutionary who is serious must listen very carefully to the people who are not heard and do not speak. Unless attention is paid to the nature of their silence there can be no transmission of either memory or possibility and the idea and practice of transformation can accordingly not exist.

Taking on board these pointers regarding good practice in feminist research, I wish to discern who the movement 'outsiders' are, as much as comprehending the profile of active participants. The prioritisation of racial identity further responds to criticisms from Friedman, et al. (2019, np) that social justice studies have failed to 'deal with' activists' fat, female and black intersecting embodied subjectivities.

The BPM is positioned (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017) as an empowerment source by fostering digital inclusion and enhancing visibility for marginalised populations. Cox (2020, p.102) advocates that 'there is strength in building communities that look like you.' Or as Ana Oliveira Garner (2020, p.75) phrased it, 'putting the "me" into media.' I pinpoint the existence of a misnomer in acknowledging that on multiple counts, the BPM has been accused of failing to practice what they preach. Jordan (1998, p.134) denotes the ever-present interrelationship between the body and direct action: 'Direct action is praxis, catharsis, and image all rolled into one… to engage in direct action you have to feel enough passion to put your values

into practice: it is literally embodying your feelings, performing your politics.'

I deliver a deeper understanding of this 'movement' by analysing whether pithy phrases, communicating a promotion of plural feminisms, are translated into meaningful action. This is a line of enquiry pursued in accordance with criticisms raised regarding if 'lip-service' paid to an intersectional orientation is mobilised into praxis. Emejuju & Sobande (2019, p.1) define black feminism as 'a praxis that identifies women racialised as Black as knowing agents of social change.' User-generated content suggests that body positivity campaigns for 'all bodies.' Nevertheless, a disconnect soon arises, upon discovering that not all bodies are achieving visibility as social change agents in the BPM.

This research direction was particularly influenced by an ethnographic content analysis (ECA) study conducted by Cwynar-Horta (2016a), which called into question the BPM's sense of community (SOC) on the Instagram platform. Cwynar-Horta's investigation began with the objective to understand how SNSs had enabled opportunities for self-presentation 'outside' of traditional gender norms. Through social media profile analysis, Cwynar-Horta (2016a, p.ii) did find evidence of agency and alternative active embodiment. Yet the major finding was that BPM connective action largely served to reinforce a sexist status quo in its replication of hegemonic beauty codes. Evidence of intolerance towards difference was encountered, observed through the way overt disgust was expressed towards BPM members who exhibited non-conformist corporeality. The study concluded that the BPM had simply 'come to represent conventionally attractive, thin white women who are being positive about their bodies' (Cwynar-Horta, 2016b, p.36). Five years has since lapsed and therefore my research caters to a need to generate an up-to-date dataset, whereby the representation of WOC particularly, can be revisited.

The imperative to revisit investigation of the BPM's racial composition was further motivated by interviews televised as part of BBC (2020b) documentary, *Body positivity movement: 'Why is my body not important'?*

The film featured several young WOC who were plus-size models. One advocate, Enam (quoted in BBC, 2020b) described how the BPM had been hijacked:

> Instagram happened and that has been really transformative, and it's been fun, but it's also been damaging at the same time. Fat black women were like: "No, this is a movement for me to celebrate because I know that the way I look, it's not accepted." Going out of my way to be positive about how I feel about myself, because every other struggle in this world is not working out, you know.

There is limited availability of BPM participant testimonies recorded in existing academic materials. This reflects its status as a young movement enacted on a mutually young SNS. Concerns regarding erasure of WOC from the BPM however dominate cultural texts. In a US edition of *Vogue* magazine, international black plus-size performer, Lizzo similarly observed how the BPM was being racially co-opted:

> It's commercialized [sic]. Now, you look at the hashtag "body positive," and you see smaller-framed girls, curvier girls. Lotta white girls… What I don't like is how the people that this was created for are not benefiting from it (Lizzo quoted in Williams, 2020, p.85).

This matter is especially pressing since Gagnon (2020, p.iii) observed that only 40% of bodies participating in 'one-dimensional' Instagram body positivity were considered marginalised, querying its capacity to modify mainstream dynamics.

This ongoing theme of uneven visibility within the BPM was confirmed in content analysis undertaken by Alentola (2017), that found an overwhelming 91% of images containing body positive hashtags featured white women. Alentola (2017, p.28) consequently remarked how the BPM was a 'movement of white women' deemed wasteful of the opportunity to diversify bodily representation. Cohen, et al., (2019a, p.51) also attempted to demographically profile members from the BPM. Their findings suggested that 51.12% of participants were coded as 'white', while 35.11% were 'coded' as 'black.' A key limitation of this study was its restricted focus exclusively on the 'top' body positive Instagram accounts which in turn, hampered the generalisability and representativeness of the data. In addition, the 640

posts subjected to analysis did not offer participants the opportunity to self-define their ethnic identity. Instead, the content analysis relied on user-generated material being externally 'coded for physical appearance-related attributes' meaning that a proportion of the sample's ethnicity 'could not be identified.' (Cohen, et al., 2019a, p.51). This is a methodological shortcoming acknowledged in my selection of the survey instrument, where self-disclosure would foster greater accuracy.

Missing Bodies

This final section addresses the existence of sanctioning structures, that enforce restrictions, when exhibiting the body online. In *The Intersectional Internet*, Noble & Tynes (2016) recognise the way power relations embedded into technical structures limit the digital's potential as a disruptive tool. Casper & Moore (2009, p.3) indicate that a fundamental feature of all cultural spaces is the phenomena of 'missing bodies.' A term used to describe those groups maligned by a wider 'politics of visibility,' that renders who vanishes and who receives aesthetic approval (Casper & Moore, 2009, p.3). This concept can be applied to SNSs, where hashtag feminism is said to currently unfold. Kafai (2019, p.71) denied Instagram's suitability as a transgressive protest space for radical feminist 'menstrual activism,' when portraiture positioning menses as 'normative rather than dirty,' was removed. I intend to chronicle experiential data from real-life hashtivists because Instagram has also been positioned as a potential barrier to fat black embodied resistance.

In *Algorithms of Oppression*, Noble (2018, p.24) drew attention to how the virtual architecture of applications can 'reinforce racism' when media infrastructures discriminate against WOC. A previous section explored how the racist organisation of social relationships led to the routine linkage of 'whiteness' with purity, virtue and goodness. Noble's (2018, p.82) work resituates the enactment of racialised beauty standards within the screen society by implicating technology conglomerates, such as Google, for granting whiteness 'superiority' and 'mainstream acceptability' as the 'default good.' These subjective systemic processes have been termed algorithmic

bias. It has been suggested that fourth-wave feminism is being fought with machines. Yet these intermediatory hosts exercise power over who gains traction, via the social capital exposure affords, in networked fields of protest. In the words of Noble (2018, p.1), discrimination is 'embedded in computer code.' This holds implications when computer-coded structures are chosen by already stigmatised bodies as social justice vehicles.

Instagram investigations led by Salty (2019; 2020) conclude that racially-motivated processes of over surveillance, aimed at profiling populations in offline communities, extend into the online through content flagging and removal, plus shadow banning[6]. Salty (2020, np) presented evidence that BPM campaigners were 'false flagged' for charges of 'sexual solicitation' and 'excessive nudity.' In the resulting report, a user attested: 'They said I violated the nudity guidelines when I didn't show any private parts at all. I'm a brown fat man so people don't like to see my skin' (quoted in Salty, 2019, p.8). Salty's research isolated the existence of racial algorithmic bias as a significant obstacle to the expression of activism and agency online. Costanza-Chock (2020, p.54) has called for 'design justice' on the basis that hashtaggers cannot dismantle structural inequality with inequal virtual structures. Techno-optimists discussed in Chapter Two, such as Castells, readily align the digital with an enhanced democratisation. The discriminative silencing of social media users suggests that this optimism can be misplaced, or at the very least, naively applied. The literature review uncovered how SNSs are far from a 'bastion for free expression' (Salty, 2020, np) when takedown notices pose interference to the possibilities for agentic re-representation.

The internet tools, equated earlier as integral to the enactment of fourth-wave feminism, are invisibilising black bodies and interrupting content creation cycles of protest (Blay, 2021; Sobande, 2020, p.83). An erasure of difference that holds significant implications for current manifestations of

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[6] Shadowbanning is a prohibition imparted by Instagram, where a user's profile is blocked from being publicly accessible, without that user's knowledge.

women's liberation grounded in the attainment of visibility for underrepresented and marginalised bodies. Digital feminist practices are manipulated by what Harvey (2016, p.11) called the 'materiality of the design of digital networks.' The agency of some body narratives is assisted, whereas others are rendered to 'outsider' status (Mendes, et al., 2019, p.53). I make an original contribution in documenting how these exclusionary conditions are experienced by BPM Instagrammers. In doing so, this research responds to calls from Tombo (2020, p.1) to explore the cultural conditions through which racism becomes normalised, via 'everyday affective interactions,' by expanding feminist enquiry to incorporate internet infrastructures.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a retrospective overview relating how the female body has been positioned within feminism. Emphasis was granted to the ways fat female identity has been historically framed, and shamed, within oppressive patriarchal structures. It is only by instilling an appreciation of the mechanisms by which feminine fatness has been controlled, disciplined and stigmatised that the activism and agency of BPM Instagrammers can be understood today. The chapter illustrated the role that feminist social constructionist theory can play in comprehending 'feminine' identities as fluid cultural constitutions. By doing so, the connective action of hashtaggers can be understood as protest in pursuit of a visually-revised world order and resituated sense of self. The connective action of BPM members was conceptualised within frameworks where social change can be achieved through the subversion of gendered stereotyping.

Subsequent sections engaged with the role racial identity can play as an additional mediatory barrier to the enactment of embodied female agency. The notion of narrow beauty standards imposing a form of social control was introduced. Initial consideration was given to 'thinness,' thereafter coverage progressed to also incorporate 'whiteness,' as an aspirational ideal. Key arguments served to highlight how old battles along the axes of weight,

gender and racial identity continue to be fought with new networked tools. A historic account detailed how BWOC have been timelessly denied opportunities to publicly formulate and frame their identity. I argue that these tendencies continue today, meaning caution must be applied when prophesising the liberatory qualities associated with SNSs. Just because many more citizens now hold a camera in their hands does not necessarily mean global audiences will get to see all their pictures. This chapter has made a critical intervention to debates situating the digital as a beacon of hope for democratisation and visual diversity given that fat black bodies are being censored out of sight. The next chapters present my methodology, followed by research findings, all of which are underpinned by the frameworks developed throughout this literature review.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

Preceding chapters have served to theorise emerging digital manifestations of an alleged feminist 'fourth wave.' Attention has also been directed at grounding the fat female body, within the literature, to establish the ways it is constructed within patriarchal society. Chapter Three related the way fat stigmatisation is politicised to cultivate fear and hatred at the expense of female dignity and self-esteem (Tyler, 2020, p.7). This chapter acknowledges the importance of applying an appropriate methodology to capture how these oppressive fat feminine constructs are thereafter dismantled and reconstructed, as part of ongoing critical feminist protest. It outlines how my intention to generate high quality research is met through my chosen methodological approach. The following sections provide an explanatory overview of this study's final design. This detailed rationale encompasses all stages of the project's evolution from initial formulation and development to sampling, piloting and finalised data analysis strategies.

My research is concerned with comprehending how female empowerment is enacted on the Instagram platform. It is purported that 'new feminists' are putting their marginalised bodies online, to achieve social change, through asserting a newfound and revised empowering visibility (Holowka, 2018, p.183). A methodology was required that went behind the selfies to access the subversive tendencies of those holding the camera (Conrad Murray, 2015, p.490). This chapter charts the development of a competently subject-centred data collection strategy. Furthermore, as collection was initiated during the first wave of a global pandemic, discussions also examine unforeseen ethical considerations taken on board in my role as an active researcher during COVID-19. This was a new consideration examined alongside other more longstanding ethical concerns, such as protecting confidentiality and obtaining informed consent.

Cat Pausé (2012, p.50) contends that the fat feminist identity is 'feared' and 'misunderstood.' My chosen methodological direction considered these

concerns about evasiveness towards the fat feminist protest experience, by critically discerning the most effective instrument to readdress this state of erasure. Hesitancy to engage in meaningful research dialogues with fat feminists means: '"Fat" and "activist" are not words that sit together well in the popular imagination' (Cooper, 2008, p.2). Therefore, my methodologic decisions were guided by the knowledge that fat feminist empowerment could only become comprehensible and legitimised if it became an integrated part of feminist scholarly discourse (Manokaran, et al., 2020). This chapter documents how access was gained to fat female voices so integral, yet largely overlooked, in academic understandings of feminist activism and agency. The following section explains why feminist methodological principles are intrinsic to making space for the fat female body in the field of sociological protest study.

Using a Feminist Methodology

This section outlines the feminist orientation underpinning my methodological choices. Discussion initially focuses on the primary data collection method, an online survey[7], which is used to gather a substantial dataset of BPM voices. In a study focusing on fat as a feminist issue, this prioritisation is granted on the basis that the collection of written 'weight autobiographies' has previously proven effective in documenting fat feminist subjectivities (Harjunen, 2009, p.42). Nevertheless, this virtual fieldwork is supplemented by a secondary tier of participant observation, to witness how BPM hashtaggers also make their voices heard in offline spaces.

The main driver of my research is to convey how political activism and agency are being enacted by predominantly female hashtag networks. Abraham (2019, p.14) attests 'making women's voice heard is important' to feminist methodology because it is when a woman is in possession of her own voice that she exercises agency. Millions of women are taking to SNSs to use their voices and it is my responsibility as a researcher, to faithfully capture and represent them in the generation of new insight about the BPM.

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[7] Please consult Appendix A to appraise the full survey layout.

Feminist scholar, Jane Ribbens (1998, p.25) positions capture of the subject's 'feeling voice' as essential to any feminist documentation of empowerment. A sense of self-efficacy is personal and emitted on a social actor's individualised terms. Therefore, Ribbens (1998, p.35) writes of the feminist researcher's knowledge production process: 'I want these voices to be heard in the public domain, to contribute to the contestation of public "expert" bodies of knowledge and to the empowerment of women.'

In the same way, my research wants to create space to accommodate new ways of thinking about social movement participation. As Walby (2007, p.1011) wrote of feminist methodologies, it is the individuals who are 'experts on the conditions of their own life.' From a research perspective, the people, i.e., Instagram users, are the experts. So little knowledge has been published relating fat female BPM performative protest and providing a platform for user voices is crucial for this project. It is only those who use SNSs that can accurately convey the rationales behind their own usage and whether they are self-empowering. Suffragette, Teresa Billington-Greig (1911, p.140) stressed that only participating protestors can be used 'as a glass through which others may see them' by granting activists space to 'write from the inside.'

In the interests of preserving activist emotive tone and sentiment, survey submission statements remain in their natural language state. By withdrawing researcher editorialisation, quoted data does contain Americanised spellings, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and colloquialisms with the view to maintain authenticity. This is in acknowledgement of feminist principles, which refrain from 'paraphrasing or censoring,' by loyally reproducing 'online forums' as close to their 'original form' as possible (Bates, 2020, p.9). With a view to maintain reliable representation of my participants, due to contested attitudes held towards 'feminist' self-ascription, when those quoted identified as fourth-wave feminists (4WF) I explicitly state this alongside the extract.

An original contribution to knowledge is made by progressing understanding

of how digitisation has impacted feminised social movement structures. This is an intention that cannot be met without the accruement of rich qualitative accounts, which prioritise the capture of subjective statements granting access to this 'feeling voice' (Ribbens, 1998, p.25). The measurement of female empowerment cannot be approached without due consideration being paid to empowering female voices. For instance, Karlsson (2007) notably validated the first-hand content creation of female diarists on blogging platforms, as forms of unfolding feminist narrative agency.

Feminist theorists (Belenky, et al., 1986) place great emphasis on the need for researchers to become attuned to 'women's ways of knowing' by acknowledging their chosen self-formation outlets. I honour this feminist tradition by initiating data collection wherever the target population are; whether this be the Instagram application to survey, or a Soho theatre for a live podcast recording to observe. My methods seamlessly infiltrate spaces where women are making their voices heard, to extract the BPM's potential life-enhancing and transformative propensities on site.

As a feminist researcher, my methodological development acknowledges the co-constitution of knowledge, and that research is a reciprocal process (Beckett & Clegg, 2007). This stance is taken in response to Keller's (2016, p.50) criticisms regarding the 'primarily quantitative methodology' historically employed by most sociologists. She states that patriarchal privileging of quantitative measures has resulted in the systematic neglect of diverse female expressions of activism outside narrow classical notions. Ryan (2006, p.45) illuminates how female activism has centred on a multitude of social justice issues, such as the environment, anti-nuclear protest and animal rights activism. Yet their gendered identity has been overlooked within social movement analysis (Ryan, 2006, p.45). Consequently, women are considered less politically engaged as social actors because definitions fail to encompass their articulations of 'activism.' For example, BPM activist, Jes Baker (2015, p.170) positions 'fatshion' as a 'form of political resistance' that implores the disenfranchised to 'wear what scares you' to oppose narrow beauty standards.

Voices from the female sociological community have demanded broader notions of 'activism.' Taft (2011, p.5) observes how in academic arenas: 'Girl activists' ideas, stories, and theoretical contributions' remain 'largely hidden from view.' However, as Bryman (2012, p.250) advises, closed questioning removes the opportunity to collect 'interesting replies that are not covered by the fixed answers.' Female activists will never attain visibility and coverage if opportunities to engage in open dialogue are not granted. Knowledge is not advanced when researchers assume that they already possess all the answers and fail to facilitate the capture of spontaneous sentiment in their surveying (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016, p.6).

Patriarchal power relationships have historically impacted on the acquisition of knowledge, leading to the creation of what Criado Perez (2019, p.xiv) describes as a 'gender data gap.' This gap is said to be a cultural side effect from the mainstream adoption of a 'masculine' positivist approach in processes of research discovery and enquiry. When worldviews are hegemonically presented from a default male position, the 'feminist dilemma' as Edwards & Ribbens (1998, p.1) phrased it, is to make private lives public knowledge by introducing these subordinated standpoints. Hence, feminist theorists stress the need for research to be undertaken into women's lived experiences, 'rather than generalising the conclusions of research on men' and applying these to 'generic "people"' (Epstein, 1981; Millen, 1997, p.114).

In 2005, Melinda Young (2005, p.251) implored feminists to 'reclaim fat and use it as a political strategy' with a view to 'advance fatness as a culturally viable, uncontested form.' It remains unknown if this reality has been realised because female hashtaggers are not validated, in their status as 'political' activists, within interrogative methodological frameworks. Fat feminist women cannot claim a political identity, if they are never offered opportunities to express it.

In contrast, a subject-centred approach tends not to treat women like objects 'to be controlled by the researcher's technical procedures, leading the emancipatory goals of feminism to be realised' (Bryman, 2016, p.403). This

thesis profiles how innovative forms of connective action are being digitally enacted and values the politically active agentic status of those protesting. The incorporation of 'open-ended process reflection questions' is advised (Charmaz, 2006, p.379) as a means for gaining new insight directly from internet content creators. This phenomenological approach was adopted by Scolere, et al. (2018) when similarly advancing knowledge of digital self-presentation practices. A qualitative stance with an inducive approach is claimed to allow participants greater power over directing the flow of the research (Matthew & Sutton, 2010, p.113). The project's qualitative structure signifies a purposeful choice made in recognition of the historical exclusion of women from 'positions of epistemic agency' during the research process (Tuana, 1996, pp.30-31).

Assessing Survey Suitability

The following section explains the suitability of the online survey through a feminist lens, a process that will later also be applied to participant observation practice. Fat feminism scholar, Harjunen (2017, p.18) used the survey method to generate over 18,000 responses detailing lived experiences of fat discrimination. Details of the study were published in popular Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* and a link to the survey was featured on their website. With a complement reserved for open-ended expression, the survey tool proved effective for charting emotive, fat, female, feminist realities.

In researching online populations, feminist methodologies have become increasingly orientated in digital interfaces, which research subjects centralise as sources of community and identity construction. Adoption of the online survey instrument was preferable to focus groups and interviews because surveys can be conducted from the networked domain where this activist community interact (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). The survey represents an established tool of interaction, and not intervention, whereby the perspective of human participants is the primary concern (Citro, 2010, p.69). My data collection's effectiveness is reliant on honest disclosures from protestors to

produce a comprehensive academic interpretation. Hill, et al. (2013) indicate that when a target population's chosen informal channels of 'sociality' are co-opted by researchers, participants are far more likely to disclose their reality, as they are already accustomed to doing so on that platform.

In addition, research subjects have been shown to respond more readily and openly to web surveys than in a face-to-face interview environment (Burkill, et al., 2016). Researcher ease of accessibility aside, the Instagram SNS signifies the computerised climate where BPM members feel most comfortable. Plus, it is within networked structures that their protest behaviours are primarily orientated. Wrenn's (2017, p.95) study into fat vegan politics adhered to the same principles, in adoption of an online survey, on the justification that 'online communities were foundational to vegan activism.' By entering this virtual 'social justice space,' the survey solicited subjective activist accounts of stigma, sizeism and thin-privilege encountered during protest (Wrenn, 2017, p.90).

The body can pose a particularly sensitive conversation topic and prompt personal admissions to be confided. For this reason, virtual solutions are preferable to establishing artificial research conditions, such as conducting face-to-face interviews. DeVault (1999, p.57) states how 'feminist survey researchers seek to include more women respondents and to develop better ways of asking about sensitive topics.' In contrast, the physical presence of the interviewer, reinforcing the researcher-researched power dynamic, can inhabit this sharing process. For instance, the term 'social desirability' describes how participants may submit responses to reflect their 'good' character when entering a face-to-face dialogue (Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007, p.307). This is what Brown & Gilligan (1992, p.29) deemed 'the moral voice,' weary of conformation to existing social expectations, as opposed to the 'authentic voice' belonging to the subject. My data collection wished to build a qualitatively rich evidence base and refrain from amassing guarded accounts carrying little meaningful insight into protest behaviours.

Anonymised surveying is preferable in an ongoing patriarchal context, that

continually subjects female-led collective action to gendered moral judgements espousing misogynist norms of 'feminine' behaviour. As witnessed through the slut-shaming rhetoric directed at members from radical feminist movement, FEMEN for scrawling manifestoes on to their bare breasts (Maginot & Chaudhuri, 2015). The literature served to suggest that if participants were aware that they could be identified, then this knowledge may prohibit what they confide and disclose on record about their protest rituals (Hill, et al., 1988; Klein & Cheuvront, 1990; Werch, 1990). This is especially the case where acts of protest may be illegal, or 'radical' and employ 'guerrilla' tactics.

Puente, et al. (2017, p.299) adopted a survey because of its faceless adaptability in sensitively documenting the 'plurality of user types and their remote use patterns' associated with online feminist activism against gender-based violence in Spain. Furthermore, Sutton (2007, p.131) spoke about the significance regarding integration of feminist methodological considerations, such as construction of a 'safe space' for disclosure, in her study of female activist networks: 'Some women voiced sorrows or secrets held in for many years, sometimes crying during the process. Some told hard stories about rape, clandestine abortions, domestic violence, prostitution, torture, sexual humiliation, and hunger.' These topics Sutton (2007, p.131) encountered contain considerable crossover with my own protest study's data collection. Survey submissions I received comprised of statements from survivors of domestic violence and rape, plus considerable dialogue documenting hunger and associated struggle with eating disorders. My research contributes to a wider trend towards the sociological exploration of 'computationally driven' emotive and empathetic flows of discursive activism (Brownlie & Shaw, 2019, p.104). Distanced contact was initiated online in a climate of confessional data collection because subjects were accustomed to self-expression and making their 'unspeakable' struggles 'visible' in digital domains (Keller, et al., 2018, p.22).

This selection of the survey instrument is an important methodological design decision. Most existing investigation undertaken into networked feminism

tends to apply content analysis to user-generated profile data, a one-way flat interaction (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Cwynar-Horta, 2016a; Luck, 2016). Fat feminism's overemphasis on representation has been vindicated in this tendency towards the body being overly objectified as an 'image' during analysis (Probyn, 2008, p.402). Researchers select a sample of social media posts and then analyse the content by projecting their own meaning on to the text (Drenton, et al., 2019). This means that all answers to research questions need to be contained within the confines of a fixed Instagram post, there is no right to reply. An alternative approach prioritises capture of the attitudes and behaviours of hashtaggers. However, it has only been adopted by a minority of social media researchers (Jackson, 2018; Turley & Fisher, 2018).

Mendes, et al. (2019) made the research decision to collaboratively gather data detailing the lived experiences of virtual activists, with a specific focus on how hashtaggers actively organised and mobilised protest, against rape culture. They explain: 'Social media platforms such as Twitter generate so much data that it can be a challenge to get "behind" the hashtag to understand the motivations, challenges, and rewards for participating in digital social justice initiatives' (Mendes, et al., 2019, p.144). For instance, a body positive selfie, analysed independently, simply evidences existence of a selfie and cannot disclose the rationale behind it. Comparatively, a survey conducted by Sheldon & Bryant (2016, p.89) revealed that Instagrammers ranked 'interpersonal interaction' and 'narcissism' as their most popular motives for use. Academic appraisal of bodies and words published on profile pages discloses nothing to meaningfully relate how these activist bodies experientially interact and what 'rhetorical tactics' permeate modes of resistance presented (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011, p.258). The notion of an 'image event' (DeLuca, 1999, pp.9-10) was introduced earlier in Chapter One, and the survey offers a solution to 'get behind' the BPM's image events.

Chevrette & Hess (2019, p.416) accuse social movement researchers as being too distracted by the act of protest itself, to the detriment of accessing

insightful 'internal rhetorics' that 'mobilize [sic] activist bodies.' The adoption of this survey strategy however results in a qualitative dialogue disclosing the logistical realities of connective action and makes it preferable to static social media analysis. A content analysis is closed and simply resembles scrutinisation of the end products of activism. In comparison, an online survey allows collection of contextual data, such as gauging insight into underlying political motivations. Nonetheless, Mendes, et al.'s (2019) study chose to omit Instagram from their analytic frame, in favour of a focus on blogging, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. This omission is where the rationale for my doctoral project resides, as this oversight reveals missing information and a gap in coverage concerning digital feminist activism. My research progressively recognises how feminist scholars, such as Beck (2021, p.179), recently distinguished Instagram as a 'legitimate' space for 'organising and protesting' integral to a 'new era of feminism.'

Moreover, the online survey is proven to be an effective instrument for the measurement of female empowerment in Instagram communities. My chosen methodological direction is particularly influenced by a previous study conducted into the #thepowerofmakeup Instagram hashtag movement (Riquelme, et al., 2018). This work exemplified how 'marginalised' communities of Kuwaiti women became empowered through SNSs. The survey instrument was employed to ask 372 hashtaggers about their Instagram use; a method that proved effectively fit-for-purpose and is consequently employed in my own study. Respondents declared how domestic Instagram activity granted them a SOC and self-efficacy. New media models of engagement provide expanded opportunities to exercise citizenship through networked advocacy. Self-imaging processes have likewise become intwined with the exercising of political consciousness, and virtual self-storying repositions politics in the 'everyday' (Boyte, 2004; Caldeira, et al., 2018a, p.23; Highfield, 2016; Pedersen, 2020b). Survey findings concluded that when Kuwaiti women retained control over the mediation of their own image, they felt empowered. Social change advocation was generated from their homestead. As Bartlett (2014, p.100) stipulates, the internet has organised citizens around single issues by

lowering entry barriers and changing the constitution of contemporary political movements.

Riquelme, et al. (2018) successfully used the survey tool to find that Instagram provided these women with an agentic space where they could critically articulate to audiences how they were not an oppressed 'other.' A finding serving to highlight Gimlin's (2002, p.110) suggestion that we should not automatically assume all outward manifestations of 'body work' correlate with patriarchal subservience. Since 'women can create spaces of empowerment from within the oppressive system of beauty ideology while neither rejecting the ideology nor clearly challenging it' (Gimlin, 2002, p.110).

Through Instagramming, Kuwaiti women could assert a counter body narrative, in opposition to dominant discourses. They wanted to make it known that make-up represented an artform to them rather than carrying connotations of objectifying oppression. Values simply being projected via Westernised commentaries. Findings reflected that Kuwaiti women had located a critical space on the Instagram platform to exercise their chosen modality of empowerment. Khader (2019, p.28) called for the decolonisation of such 'universalism' asserted by 'missionary feminism' achieved through development of an alternative 'transnational feminist ethic.' Qualitative survey sections provide opportunities for respondents to assert plural feminist positions. This work underscores the survey's suitability in the study of Instagram's networked hashtag communities to amplify the voices of oft patronised populations.

A largely qualitative online survey design is chosen based on its flexible capacity to collect nuanced and diverse feminist identities. Such a methodological decision acknowledges the work of feminist scholars, such as Skeggs (1997), who has condemned the enforced homogeneity of a universalist 'female' identity. Skeggs (1997) warns it is imperative to recognise the agency of individual women. She advises researchers to avoid the presentation of a singular and passive interpretation of 'female-wide' experience. My project is informed by knowledge generated from

hashtaggers. Accordingly, closed capture devices dominated by tick-boxes were not conducive to the acquisition of diverse protestor perspectives. A caution applied in Tyler's (2013, p.213) exploration of naked protest actioned by female indigenous and immigrant subjects:

> We need to be attentive, in framing the protests of others, to the risks involved in the claims we make for such protests when they are animated and in academic accounts… my intention is not to represent the protests in ways which fix the meaning of these acts and I cannot and do not claim to speak on behalf of the protestors.

In adherence to these pointers of good feminist research practice, I ensure expressive features are incorporated. These are present in the form of large text boxes which were open, dynamic and amenable to change in order that the agency of all participants can be acknowledged (Kramarae & Spender, 2004, p.1863; Smyth, et al., 2009).

Quantitative research methodologies have a historically biased tendency to suppress the voices of women (Mies & Shiva, 1993). This is achieved via strategies of so-called 'discovery' either ignoring their input or 'submerging' their standpoints in a 'torrent of facts and statistics' (Bryman, 2016, p.403). Nevertheless, Maddison & Shaw (2012, p.414) advise it is 'imperative' for feminist research praxis to adopt a 'plurality of methodological approaches' because this enables the well-rounded encapsulation of social movement activities, attitudes and attributes. My final survey design takes a mixed methods approach by incorporating a small series of closed questions to generate descriptive quantitative socio-demographic indicators. An addition accommodated to draw generalisable statements from the sample population, which are representative of wider BPM behaviours and attitudes. This helps operationalise an understanding of how political activism and agency are socially distributed based on age, gender and race. This replicates research on Twitter (Sloan, 2017), in which quantitative data extraction was used to build a profile of who 'tweets' in the UK. The standardisation of capturing these quantitative attributes would allow statistically significant patterns in participation and intersectional nuances to be pinpointed.

Sourcing Survey Participants

This section details how access was gained to the study's survey participants. The target population are #BodyPositive hashtaggers on the image-based app, Instagram. To meet my research aims and objectives, it was important to initiate investigation online, at the site of protest. Postill (2008, p.415) discusses how a digital ethnography is becoming increasingly common for sociologists in a computerised climate where the old communities of 'streets and alleys' have been exchanged for community sites built from 'bits and bytes.' I adopt what Silverman (2014, p.243) defines as a 'netography' in how Instagram is utilised to source and facilitate engagement with my chosen research participants.

Figure 4.1

#BodyPositive Instagram post published by @_chubbydane.

Source: Helen Thyrsted (2019)
        Printed with written permission.

Social media outreach was integral to both, sample selection and survey distribution. The sample frame of 1,067 Instagrammers was built over a period spanning 60 days. Systematic sampling was used where chosen participants met the selection criteria that they all had published an Instagram post including the #BodyPositive hashtag (See Fig 4.1). Rosenbaum (2018) employed this strategy during her Twitter study into digital cultures. Subjects were selected for analysis on the basis they had used a social justice hashtag relating to race. Similarly, Neumayer, et al. (2017) selected activist participants for their ethnographic enquiry into Frankfurt Blockupy protest based on hashtag use.

Vitally, hashtaggers were recruited on the basis that their public post has featured in the 'Most Recent' feed. This is an important strategic stipulation. I extracted subjects from the 'Most Recent,' as opposed to the 'Top Posts' data stream, in response to elitist sample selection practices encountered in the literature. Previous studies into Instagram users have granted greater emphasis to the sampling of 'relevant important content creators' as subjects, in turn hindering the generalisability and inclusivity of the ensuing findings (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020, p.4). A privileging of exclusively well-subscribed profiles that has infiltrated body positive research, where only 'popular' Instagrammers are coded for analysis. For example, Cohen, et al. (2019a, p.49) composed their sample frame by querying, 'top body positive Instagram accounts' into search engines. Likewise, Kelly & Daneshjoo (2019) only extracted a sample from the top 100 #bodypositive hashtags in their Instagram study, meaning that models and prolific bloggers were overrepresented.

I responded to a need to encompass 'people power' into sampling reach. By selecting the 'Most Recent' posts, my target population was not selectively discriminated against in gaining access to the survey, on the grounds of how much social capital (e.g., high follower count) they possess. In doing so, my study meets its aim of generating a comprehensive account documenting the BPM's collective activist profile, while attaining a full breadth of protest patterns.

Once I selected my users, I either sent them a direct message (DM) or an email containing a link inviting them to complete the survey. My Instagram profile would function as an outreach point to initiate contact with hashtaggers relating details of my study. Rosalind Edwards (1990, p.478) instructs feminist researchers to apply deep consideration to the logistical arrangement between the researcher and the researched, to dispel mediating power relations. By opening an Instagram account for the purpose of this experiment, my identity as an 'authoritative' interviewer was somewhat equalised through becoming immersed in the unalienating existing interface.

Similarly, during 2000-2004, Senft (2008, p.9) engaged in 'explicitly feminist' research into 'Camgirls,' a female usership that frequented early SNSs such as LiveJournal, MySpace and YouTube. This ground-breaking work challenged long held conceptions relating what could possibly constitute a 'feminist' space. By becoming accessible on these sites of interest, through the instant messaging (IM) function, Senft (2008) obtained direct insight from those women who used emerging video camera practices to share images of their bodies online. My methodological design recognises this need to orientate feminist research in the relatable everyday experiences of activists.

Following recommendations received from the research community during review panel meetings, I re-evaluated the fact that the BPM was a 'global' movement. As such, its networked constitution spanned many different regional boundaries and time zones. To avoid Anglocentric bias from my researcher position, amendments were made to my original data collection strategy accordingly, to accommodate twice-daily data extraction points. Consequently, 10 users were to be selected between 9:00am-9:30am and a further 10 between 6:00pm-6:30pm over 60 days. The validity of the study, when making future projections regarding collective stances and statements, would be improved by a research design that incorporated the broadness of this networked userbase. This action has been taken in the interests of maximising the generalisability of the final dataset.

Sandberg & Copes (2012, p.177) describe how the meaning of the word

'field' in the study of protest has shifted to describe any site where 'researchers spend a great deal of time in the field with the hope of understanding the social system or culture.' They state how ethnography once related to 'leaving the office, interacting with people, and interacting in, a field site' (Hine, 2000, p.43; Sandberg & Copes, 2012, p.177). I acknowledge how 'field' can relate to any social setting where interaction takes place between individuals, such as SNSs (Boeri & Lamonica, 2015, p.134). Furthermore, Hine (2000, pp.43-50) has adopted the term 'internet event' to describe how a study can centre on one particular media event, such as a hashtag campaign. This is a phenomenon that my project recognises through its focus on the internet event of, #BodyPositive connective action, and core conceptualisation of Instagram as a protest site.

The target population is located in virtual structures. They readily present the opportunity to extract a convenience sample, in that they are easily accessible, as the big data and userbase are in existence on SNSs. However, my approach stands more aligned with a systematic sampling strategy, in how it isolates what Gobo (2007, p.203) called an 'interactive unit' of social relationships conjoined based on a set of 'trending topics' (Piña-García, et al., 2016, p.1). The symbol (#) has come to represent a cornerstone in cyber 'struggles for recognition' by functioning as a source of connectivity for users to foster online group identities, as the hashtag homogenises via 'searchable signatures' (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2013, p.5). If one applies the hashtag, they become a member of the 'movement.' The hashtag imposes perimeters around strands of shared thought on social media and forges communities. In turn, this hyperlinked metadata functions to produce the boundaries of a readymade target population.

Despite some of the methodological shortcomings associated with content analysis, explored in earlier sections, this method still performs an important function within my research. Textual analysis is simply not relied upon as the sole device in my data collection strategy. Once I started to build a survey sample frame comprised from live #BodyPositive Instagram posts, recurring concerns and types of virtual behaviour were discerned. As I encountered

more and more collective visual idiosyncrasies, it became apparent that I would need to apply a media studies aspect to my project's presentation. In the interests of maintaining general audience accessibility, illustrative examples were required to fully demonstrate the movement-specific techniques adopted by hashtaggers. It may be commonplace practice for Instagrammers to transmit pictures of their bikini-clad bodies to a global audience, yet such digital decorum could present an alien concept to those who do not have an Instagram account or participate within the BPM.

Content analysis started to play a subsidiary role within my methodological design, as a proactive response to these concerns. Key themes were extracted from sample material then visually represented throughout this thesis to assist comprehension and add argumentative emphasis. I noted the presence of dominant digital actions (e.g., subversion of the Before-and-After format) and core ideological standpoints (e.g., 'All bodies are good bodies') arising within user content. Thereafter, real-life example images were sought from public Instagram posts to vividly convey the BPM's repertoire of highly optical characteristics. Upon locating suitable images, hashtaggers were contacted directly to obtain written permission to feature their social media material in my study. Archive images are similarly retrieved, inserted and analysed to add critical depth to debate during my literature review and the discussion of my findings. These visual artefacts powerfully depict the historic plight faced by fat populations to achieve representation, respect and recognition.

The Piloting Process

Aside from recommendations contained in the literature, another source of influence regarding methodological development, derived from the project's pilot study. Once the survey structure was drafted, it was imperative to test the instrument. At the preliminary planning stage, before the online survey went live, a pilot study was conducted. This decision follows Babbie's (2013) suggestion that a guiding principle for effective question construction is ensuring members from your target population understand your questions

and possess the existing knowledge base to respond. Piloting provided a purposeful opportunity to evaluate the comprehensiveness of question wording and the viability of the question ordering.

Blessing & Chakrabarti (2009, p.114) stress the importance of a pilot study to improve the design research methodology (DRM) of any project which is to be 'effective and efficient.' Feedback can facilitate positive adjustment, in the interests of making questions less ambiguous and demystifying any difficult phraseology. Weisberg, et al. (1996, p.84) assert ambiguous wording must be avoided at all costs, as 'the meaning of words in survey questions must be clear to all respondents.' The first phase of piloting consisted of cognitive interviewing with members from the online BPM, including artists and organisation leaders.

Figure 4.2

Instagram Stories post published by Cardiff University Feminist Society (@cufemsoc) to advertise the pilot study, dated 25th February 2020.

Source: Cardiff University Feminist Society (2020)

Feedback suggested the removal of several 'academic' phrases, plus the insertion of definitions where appropriate. In survey design, Marr (2010, p.75) enlists the importance of 'clear phrasing' and 'simple language' use without the presence of complicated 'jargon,' that only serves to distort interpretation. Once corrections were applied, the second phase of piloting commenced where a focus group (See Fig. 4.2) was held consisting of student members from Cardiff University Feminist Society (CUFEMSOC). In summary, pilot participants prioritised the need for an open structure that could accommodate the nuances of intersectional contemporary feminism.

Participant Observation: Deploying a Multimethodology

The pilot study informed my decision to apply a dual aspect to data collection by supplementing my survey strategy with a participant observation component. Pilot study members expressed offline organisation was an area of interest. Particularly, more information was desired about whether BPM virtual action converts into direct action, such as was the case with the 2011 SlutWalk Movement that went 'viral' and thereafter amassed a transnational street presence (Carr, 2013; Mendes, 2015).

My choice was also developed in tandem with feminist methodological principles, which are documented here. The danger with maintaining an exclusively online-orientated research position is that the target population under investigation can seem a faraway networked phenomenon. A detachment instilled by screen-mediated communication. Whereas feminist methodologies are supposedly said (DeVault, 1999, pp.31-32) to offer 'liberating' alternatives to 'distanced, distorting, and dispassionately objective procedures.'

Sutton's (2007, p.132) exploration into Argentinian women's embodied resistance against socioeconomic processes integrated a supporting participatory facet, precisely to alleviate this sense of researcher distance from protest study:

> Research, politics, comradeship became tightly entwined in my involvement in social movement actions. I was not a distant or neutral observer… I experienced conflict and frustration, bodily tiredness and exhilaration during political protests, and the empowering feelings that derive from collective action.

By introducing an element of participant observation into my own research approach, to supplement digital dialogue, an appreciation of how 'group ties' are established outside of Instagram's networked structure could be obtained (Lichterman, 1998, p.401). Harding's (1978) recognition that there is not an atypical 'feminist' methodology, but rather it is a process of selecting the most suitable strategy to serve the purpose of the study, is apt here. Small-scale offline field research would generate additional insight into the extended protest logics of BoPo Warriors, surmounting digital content creation cycles, to appraise the full breadth of their support base (McKee Hurwitz & Taylor, 2018, pp.337-342).

The online survey instrument represents the primary means of collecting qualitative testimonies documenting protest habits. Nonetheless, numerous studies into female activism have further highlighted the suitability of fieldwork as a 'critical tool' where researchers act as participant observers (Pezzullo, 2003, p.361). During Pezzullo's (2003, p.354) study into breast cancer activism, the researcher attended a Toxic Links Coalition (TLC) walking tour to gain a 'more detailed and textured account of the activities of TLC than exists, for example, in secondary sources.' The event was led by an activist network who coordinated the route to incorporate San Francisco companies implicated in the causation of breast cancer through pollutants. Pezzullo (2003, p.361) provided the following reasoned justification for integrating a fieldwork component:

> As a critical tool, participant observation compels critics to travel to public spaces to feel, to observe, and to participate in cultural performances firsthand [sic]… It reminds us that publics are not phenomena that exist "out there," involving other people and affecting bodies other than our own.

Moreover, this strategy has been successfully applied to the study of fat activism. As part of her research into how fat female activist collectives reconstruct 'non-deviant' embodied identities, in response to weight-based

stigmatisation, Debra L. Gimlin (2002, p.126) employed participant observation. During the 1990s, Gimlin (2002, p.114) became a member of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and gathered experiential data through attendance at chapter 'business meetings, dinners (which were always held in all-you-can-eat restaurants), parties, dances, fashion shows, and clothing swaps.' An approach that allowed access to unfolding 'attempts to transform the meaning of the fat body' beyond static manifesto material (Gimlin, 2002, p.132).

These studies influenced the development of my data collection strategy. They imparted understanding regarding the importance of applying a 'participatory critical rhetoric' to supplement screen-based methods with in-person data collection (Chevrette & Hess, 2019, p.419). This was particularly useful when investigation aims to comprehend if internet-initiated activism and agency also occupies physical IRL spaces. In response to these applied approaches raised in the literature, an ethnographic element would be incorporated through my attendance at some offline body positive events, in the capacity of a participant observer, to support my survey data. As Lin (2019, p.868) notes, ethnographic data has the 'advantage when collecting first-hand data,' although 'ethnographic observation alone is insufficient' in protest analysis 'to determine motives, stories, experiences or emotions.'

I wanted to maximise my engagement with participants from the BPM. A motivation that meant my outreach strategy needed to expand contact beyond screen-based pursuits. I knew from personal experience, as an activist-scholar (Lennox & Yaprak Yıldız, 2020), that I had channelled body positive messages at organised events in physical community spaces. For example, Figure 4.3 features images documenting a body positive talk I gave about fat and feminism. This address was delivered to a group of women at a primary school for one of HERstory Cardiff's monthly empowerment meetings. A suitably feminist methodology was required for research engaged in measuring feminist-defined forms of activism and agency, which are non-prescriptive and myriad in form and space.
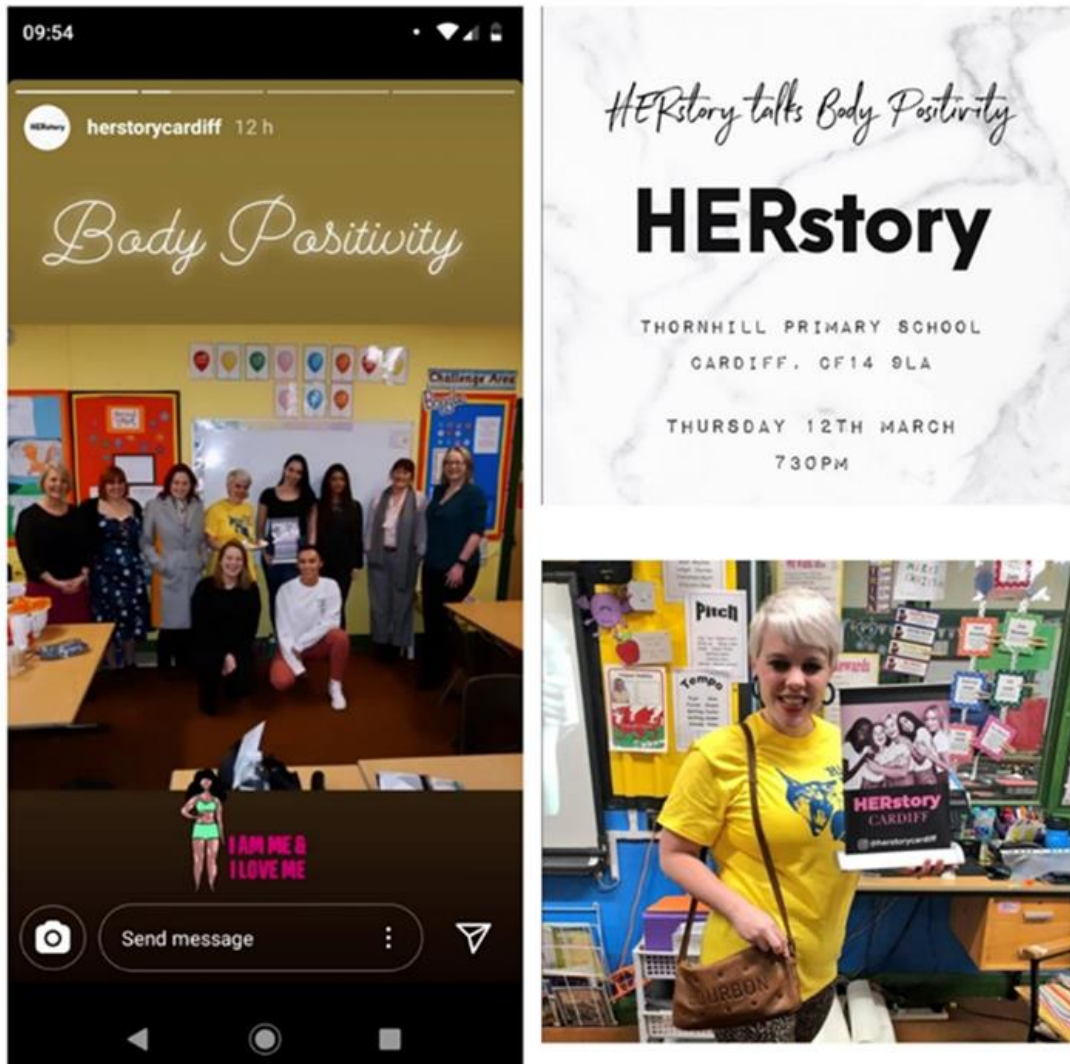
Figure 4.3

Instagram posts documenting a body positive feminist talk I gave as part of a HERstory empowerment meeting.

Source: HERstory Cardiff (2020)

Feminist scholar, Mary Katzenstein (1995, p.35) deemed this the drive to destabilise 'politics-as-usual' notions, premised in institutional ideals, to reassert focus on 'discursive' grassroots womanly spaces. These change effective meeting points, are defined as political, on the basis that radical norm-defying rhetoric unfolds there (Katzenstein, 1997, pp.195-196). I therefore sought out sites of interest (See Fig 4.4) for participant observation, where women had chosen to enact their empowerment, in the offline realm. I subsequently attended the following body positive events:

- Bodyposipanda's Never Say Diet Club Live, Cardiff
  – 20th September 2019

- Anti Diet Riot Fest, Hoxton, London
  – 19th January 2020

- Fat Chat Live Podcast Recording, Soho, London
  – 1st March 2020

All of the above were coordinated by current members from the BPM Instagram community. In choosing subject-selected spaces for analysis, this approach was not merely expanding the scope of my research, but also disrupting and disregarding narrow patriarchal notions of what constitutes 'political' action. Rather than imposing artificial conditions, or my own 'arbitrary definition of feminism,' I informally witnessed women occupying their own empowering environments removed from 'traditional hierarchical authorities' (Zwissler, 2018, pp.24-25).
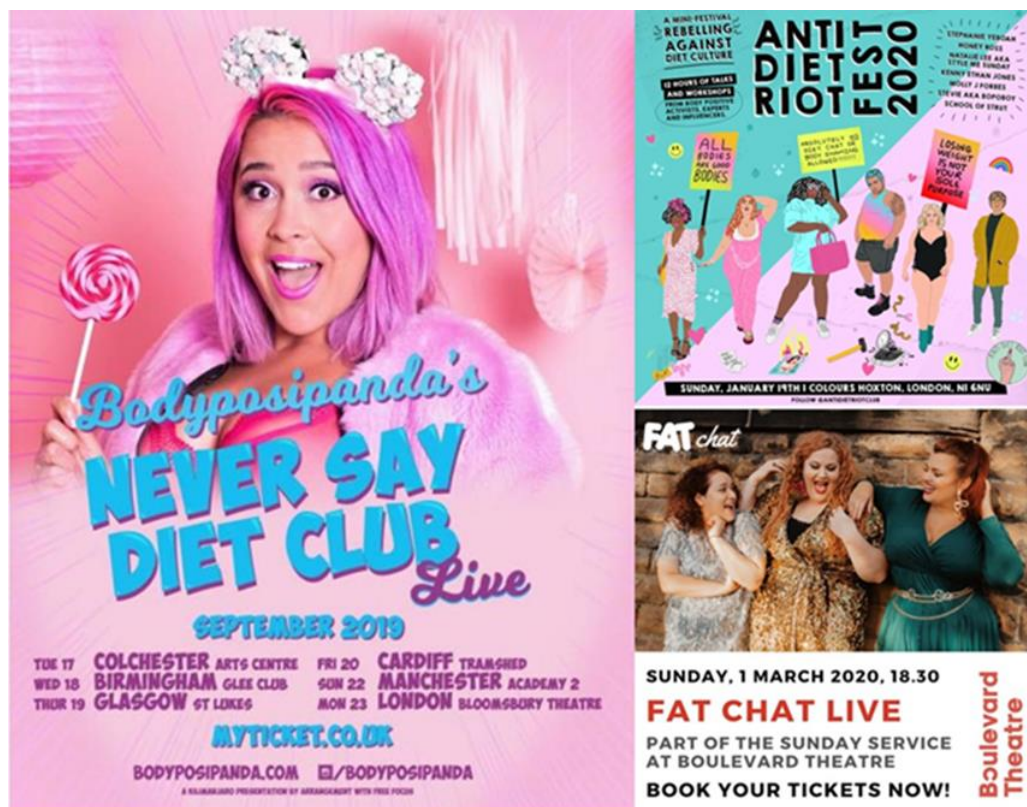
Figure 4.4

Promotional material for three body positive IRL events, attended as part of my participant observation research component.

Source: Bodyposipanda (2019), Anti Diet Riot Fest (2020) & Boulevard Theatre (2020)

The advantage of participant observation was that I got to witness how BPM members interacted, as part of a collective, removed from the confines of the onscreen Instagram grid. The disadvantage was that due to this study's status as a one-person research project, with limitations on both time and expenses, attendance was restricted to UK based activity, which was within reasonable proximity.

Positionality: Locating the researcher 'self' amongst the selfies

Consulting with members from the body positive and feminist community in relation to research design signified a vital part of project development. All the same, critical self-reflection also had to be applied regarding how my own life circumstances and aspects of my identity may influence the way data is interpreted. Letherby (2003, p.5) accentuates how 'all research is ideological because no one can separate themselves from the world.' The disclosure of positionality originated in feminist scholarship. Valentine (2002, pp.115-116) outlines how knowledge and understanding are culturally contingent, as opposed to notions that there is an 'objective' or 'universal' version of truth. Feminist researchers therefore have a duty to exercise awareness of their positionality, to comprehend how their knowledge is socially situated within a range of structures (Simandan, 2019, p.129). Exercising self-awareness was crucial to comprehending how my identity, as a researcher, and my studied environment, interrelate.

Stanley & Wise (1993, p.168) stress it is of paramount importance that a feminist researcher is open through 'displaying her actions, reasonings, deductions and evidence to other people.' Establishment of researcher positionality has been deemed by Etherington (2004) as a vehicle essential to research design, where the researcher is conceptualised as 'subject,' including their autobiography. Effective research practice requires academics scrutinise their own standpoint by critically assessing their chosen phenomena through the lens of their own lived experience. In adherence to such guidance, where transparency relating to feminist researcher identity and personal motivations matter, I choose this section to share my origin

story. In a similar vein to how second-wave feminists previously shared stories of struggle through consciousness-raising processes to generate social change.

To situate my 'self' as a researcher in this project and disclose my positionality, it is imperative to briefly detail how I first encountered the BPM. Especially since my own personal provenance has proven to correlate with a significant amount of first-hand testimonial data received from my respondents. For instance, the following survey submission stated:

> *I've struggled with an eating disorder for most of my life. When I started seeing women promoting body positivity online, it inspired me and made me love my body the way it is.*

In 2013, I was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. I have since recovered from my eating disorder. However, it was during the recovery process and under these difficult personal circumstances that I first discovered body positive networked spaces. The resistance demonstrated by Instagrammers towards the profit-driven diet industry, plus exposure to a diversity of body types, provided me with a gateway to an alternative worldview.

Reay (1996, p.57) advises that researchers engage in reflexivity to appreciate the impact that their own social position can have on how 'certain aspects' of a dataset command 'much more' prominence 'than others,' making all academic interpretations consequently 'imperfect' and an 'incomplete process.' Feminist approaches have required researchers to demonstrate such reflexive practice. An approach that demands what England (1994, p.80) deemed 'greater reflection' than the requirements of objectivist social science. By disclosing details of my own relationship with the BPM, hashtaggers are not conceptualised as 'others' and power relations are not presented as hierarchical between the researcher and the researched.

When locating the research and the researcher, Kirby et al. (2006, p.37) stress that 'the researcher does not have to minimize [sic] his or her own investment in the issue on the pretence of maintaining objective.' In fact, the

more familiarity with the issue, the better prior understanding the researcher will possess. A point only underlined by prevalence of the 'activist-scholar' denoting how 'cultural critique' can productively collaborate with 'political action' (Bejarano et al., 2019; Hale, 2008, p.158; Speed, 2006, p.66). For example, feminist studies into fandom (Hannell, 2020) encourage development of a 'dual positionality' as an 'acafan,' when there is an underlying tie to the focal subject based on affect and emotion.

Furthermore, Kirby, et al. (2006, p.37) argue how new insight can derive from personal passions, which often researchers declare from the onset with a view to avoid bias. Fat activist-researcher, Charlotte Cooper (2016) conducted the very first in-depth ethnography of fat activists following years of ongoing direct involvement at the coalface of the social movement herself. My approach aligns with observations made by England (1994, p.80) that a 'researcher's positionality and biography' influence the subsequent fieldwork, conceptualising fieldwork as 'a dialogical process which is structured by the researcher and the participants.'

Ethical Concerns

Social movements often introduce 'new ways of seeing the world' and an ethical approach is crucial to protect those subjects supplying their personal perspectives for research purposes (Cox & Forminaya, 2009, p.1). An ethical stance ensures that no demands are imposed by researchers that would compromise respondent safety. Before data collection could commence, my application for ethics panel approval was submitted and granted the following month. This was sought in accordance with best practice recommendations because my data collection involved direct contact with hundreds of online human subjects.

Notably, during March 2020, online social research methods became necessitated by academic institutions. This directive was issued in response to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, that happened to coincide with my data collection and suddenly prohibited in-person methods at this time. Digitally

distanced methods posed the only viable working option when my online survey went live on 17th April 2020. Little logistical disruption was posed to my study in this regard because networked outreach was always a core part of my original research strategy. Fortunately, by this project juncture, I had successfully undertaken all participant observation aspects of my data collection.

The project was undertaken in accordance with advice supplied by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR). They indicate how all ethical research is founded on first obtaining informed consent from those participating. With this fundamental obligation in mind, the 'face sheet' of my online survey explained clearly from the start of data collection that by choosing to participate, individuals were consenting to the process, plus could withdraw at any time. A vital reassurance because, as advised by Stuart & Barnes (2005, p.3), conducting ethical research is not just about the collection process but 'preserving the dignity, rights and wellbeing' of research participants. This includes a duty to accurately reproduce the 'digital lives' of Instagrammers and exercise researcher control responsibly, in alignment with subject permissions (Serafinelli, 2018, p.42).

Legal obligations with regards to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines were also acknowledged through my research design. These requirements state that the rationale behind data collection must be transparently stipulated. Participants have the right to be informed about how their data will be processed. This legislative imperative was met by also stating the purpose of my data processing on the survey's front page. Transparency was fostered with hashtaggers by outlining mutual expectations prior to survey completion. This follows recommendations from Kozinets (2010, p.148) suggesting that ethical 'netnography' should commence with researchers introducing themselves, disclosing their work's focus and detailing what form the experiment will take.

My participants were further briefed in how the study results would be used. This is important as existing literature (Fink, 2006, p.41) suggests the public

are already considerably suspicious of the survey device and that the information they provide may be used inappropriately by the owner. Cormode and Srivastava (2009) advise that the privacy of those in the social network should also be protected, in order that no unauthorised parties can infer anything from final published data. Efforts were therefore made to anonymise participants in the interests of respecting their confidentiality. In participant observation statements, only established public figures were expressly named. Online surveys on the other hand, can never be considered truly anonymous where IP addresses and socio-demographic data can be used to possibly identify persons. Nevertheless, to minimise any risk to harm, surveys did not collect the names of participants. If any named persons were contained in survey responses, this identifying information was redacted. Throughout the presentation of my findings, pseudonyms are allocated to survey respondents. This approach is adopted to build up a sense of the characteristics belonging to individual social agents from the Instagram network, while ensuring their security is considered.

In order to manage any potential risk of harm posed to vulnerable individuals, the survey's face sheet also prominently featured an age disclaimer notice. This stipulated how all participants must be over 18 years of age. Instagram requires users to be at least 13 years old when they create an account. Therefore, this membership criteria still meant that vulnerable human subjects could be encountered across the course of my research. The possibility existed that minors under the age of 18 could feature in my sample frame, or a selected social media user of focus may lie about their age. Research undertaken by age-verification provider, AgeChecked (2019, p.5) found that 59% of British children under the age of 10 have started using some sort of SNS. Ultimately though, SNSs represent user-generated platforms and in turn, the survey relied on the open trust of its participants through self-disclosure to reveal their true ages.

During data collection, any Instagram posts featured within the sample which 'appeared' to feature a minor were immediately discounted from research scope. Visual age recognition is an unreliable form of verification. An issue

only exacerbated by the fact there is no default age field featured in the Instagram profile interface. Despite this, incorporation of an age disclaimer notice signifies a safeguarding strategy deployed to limit any child involvement in the project.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Survey Data Analysis

This segment opens with a prioritised discussion of qualitative analysis because my survey was predominantly qualitative in structure. The online survey closed after just over a fortnight. It remained active between 17th April – 4th May 2020. The decision was taken to close the tool, following an overwhelming number of responses, received in this relatively short timeframe. A total of 502 completed surveys were submitted. On reflection, the age disclaimer proved effective, as only one submission was received from a 17-year-old minor and subsequently removed from analysis.

Once data collection was finalised, the project applied Braun & Clarke's (2006, p.87) thematic analysis framework to the qualitative proponent of the dataset. It is deemed the most effective way to present a 'rich thematic description' of your entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.83). The strength of their thematic framework resides with its flexibility, as it can be applied 'to different epistemological and ontological positions' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.77; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p.3352). An approach that allowed multiple lines of enquiry to be considered simultaneously, in accordance with my project's differing objectives.

The main motivation behind selecting this interpretative approach was the ease and accessibility it brought when drawing 'patterns of meaning' and 'issues of potential interest' from a substantial empirical dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86). Thematic analysis helped to demystify results by teasing out the common themes and relating them back to my research questions. After the collection process, the coding of thematic analysis gave my thesis structure and allowed digital behavioural patterns and shared

sentiment to be pinpointed from my participants' responses. By doing so, as Braun & Clarke (2006, p.83) state, 'the reader gets a sense of the predominant or important themes' once these recurrent threads are isolated, coded and analysed.

When perusing hundreds of qualitative responses, the adoption of thematic analysis ultimately allowed exploration of whether #BodyPositive Instagrammers shared common recurring patterns of activist behaviour and attitudinal standpoints to fulfil my research objectives. Firstly, I familiarised myself with the dataset by reviewing the survey responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). Thematic analysis provided a vital framework to present the important aspects of the data, meaning I could initially skim over the results to my expressive open question structures. This consisted of appraising the feedback received, via the online survey tool, in order that any immediate surface trends could be noted. Within a thematic analysis methodology, I was searching for the prevalence of certain issues within the answers submitted, such as levels of feminist affiliation and the degree of political propensity.

Secondly, following this initial scan of participant data, I started to generate a set of codes for responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.88). The presence of hashtag feminism's prominent drivers could be pinpointed, via the isolation of common trigger words. Emergent coding techniques offer an element of responsive flexibility when analysing free-text fields (Merolli, et al., 2014). In accordance with recommendations from Karweit & Meyers (1983), survey responses were coded before analysis could begin. Codes adhered to natural language principles as much as possible, in the interest of maintaining clarity, while documenting 'something unique to the participant's perspective' (Kara, 2015, p.156).

Thirdly, data analysis commenced, and I could start to formally acknowledge these arising 'themes' such as shared anti-diet culture sentiment (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.89). Coding allowed for the generation of descriptive statistics, which would in turn lead projective statements to be forged about

group trends and shared inclinations. During phase four, these common themes and codes became successfully established. At this point, my research started to 'review themes' and coded responses in accordance with my study's questions and objectives meaning a coherent collective narrative of action became discernible (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91).

At stage five, I reached the penultimate part of the analysis and started actively 'refining' the 'essence' of my leading conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). By this latter phase, a deductive approach exceeded the realm of mere thematic investigation to encompass elements of factor analysis. Leon (2003, p.14) defines a deductive approach as when data is analysed 'based on ideas and past research and is formulated before any tests are made.' This is the case in relation to my study, whereby aligned with Fink's (2002, p.113) definition, I used 'preselected themes and subthemes derived from the research literature and my own experience' in dataset analysis. Protest patterns were scrutinised in accordance with theoretic conceptualisations of 'social movement' activity. Furthermore, associations were made between certain variables to pinpoint the presence of significant arising relationships.

Following a detailed analysis, stage six represented the final phase and centred on documentation of the data into a cohesive report structure (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93). In the words of Jolly (2019, p. xiii), 'history depends on the kindness, courage and candor [sic] of people willing to give their stories to the public record.' The overall aim was to generate a written academic record of what O'Cathain & Thomas (2004) call 'depth data' or 'stories.' This record makes an original contribution by providing an empirical statement reflecting insights into a hashtag social movement's collective behaviours and identity.

Quantitative Survey Data Analysis

A mixed methods approach to surveying allowed open and closed data points to work in conjunction, whereby quantitative collective patterns could

be appraised in tandem with qualitative individual attitudinal statements. This second section specifically outlines the data analysis plan regarding quantitative aspects of my survey. Statistical components played a crucial role in the storying of my findings. Closed lines of questioning functioned to instantly provide enumerated access to generalised positions held within the BPM. A standardised survey design sorted large volumes of self-reporting into consolidated quantitative statements to see if dispersed digital populations could agree on a core movement message. What Lavrakas (2008, p.427) refers to as 'specific stimulus statements' were generated by Agree/Disagree quantitative points. This made expressed attitudes immediately available for analysis.

Through quantitative narrative analysis, counts were used to build a bigger picture from consensus positions. Response patterns drew attention to the existence of emerging belief systems, the presence of which, being essential to 'social movement' identity. At this initial stage of analysis, quantitative responses were coded and sorted to establish the major arguments being made by the group. Unencumbered by elaboration and detail, the scarcity in linguistic excess meant statistics could be compiled into convenient summaries with ease, to make sways in opinion easily observable (Nardi, 2015, p.19).

The second stage in the quantitative data analysis focused on connecting these freshly assessed consolidations of public opinion with my leading research problems. Riley (1963, p.23) advises that measurement means 'linking abstract concepts to observable indicators' building an 'explicit and organized [sic] plan for classifying data in terms of the general questions in the researcher's mind.' Statistical survey questions are instruments of measurement when developed in direct consort with research questions. Patton (1990, pp.168-169) advises the need to settle on a suitable unit of analysis: 'decide what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study.' My survey structure was purposefully formatted, in order that certain question categories corresponded with areas of concern developed during literature review.

Analysis was thereafter applied on a deeper level, embarking on deductive enquiry to subcategorise trends based on their differentiated distribution across socio-demographics. A summing up crucial to the successful profiling of the BPM. This is referred to as the data 'crunching' stage because it culminates in variables being cross-referenced and tested in alignment with hypotheses (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012, p.276). Whereas preceding stages fixated on isolating surface-level trends, such as whether BPM members identified as 'feminists,' this latter stage refined label ascription levels through filters. For example, my data analysis plan applied this culminating layer of in-depth segmentation to address how racialised dynamics impacted engagement with hashtag feminism.

Participant Observation Data Analysis

I will now detail the data analysis process relating to the participant observation aspect of my methodology. A multimethodology was applied to uncover the fullness of BPM protest. This aided the generalisation of identifiable collective behavioural traits. A key research objective concentrated on how fourth-wave feminist identities were exercised, if at all, in our offline world. Qualitative survey segments were suitable for assessing if BPM members self-classified their behaviours as 'political.' However, objectives were simultaneously concerned with the ways in which political consciousness is channelled in both, networked and physical spaces.

Contemporary offline action repertoires are multifaceted in form (Gerbaudo, 2020), meaning an experiential analytic element would facilitate a nuanced response to understanding complex protest logics. The BPM are an extroverted, visual and mass-subscribed cohort that the analysis of plain text survey responses alone would fail to comprehensively convey. Survey submissions would suffice to affirm whether Instagrammers engaged in any forms of direct action. Nonetheless, supplementary ethnographic analysis, undertaken at live body positive events, would support the survey data and further aid the illumination of research findings.

Three UK body positive events were selected to attend and perform participant observation studies. On site, photographic evidence was taken, and field notes drafted into structured statements. Following guidance, issued by Busher (2015, p.15) from his investigation into English Defence League (EDL) protest, fieldnotes were written up promptly following participation. My own reflective writing process often took place during train rides home, within an hour of vacating sites of interest. Adhering to this time window is important to maintaining clarity of vision and increases the accuracy of recall to produce a sharper analysis. In the words of Jasper (2010, p.967), 'the little pieces of strategic interaction' present 'the micro-level building blocks' of protest patterns.

Statements were free-flowing in structure, but reflected a critical process guided by the conceptual frameworks encountered during literature review. For example, field-based observation was directed by Melucci's (1989) three-prong social movement framework, to identify unfolding characteristics. This is what Russell Bernard & Ryan (2009, p.76) term 'structural coding,' whereby common characteristics are scrutinised in line with pre-established conceptual frameworks. Further mediatory rhetorical devices were evident, such as the active application of postfeminist standpoints. Postfeminist perspectives guided on-the-spot analysis through an onus on the way empowerment was enacted when BPM advocates inhabit performance venues and nightclub spaces.

Released from the structural constraints of the survey, participant observation statements broadened the analytic scope to produce a more robust line of enquiry. Ottenberg (1990) emphasises that fieldwork comes into fruition post-recording, precisely when the print matter is appraised in correspondence with existing ideas and concepts to forge meaningful connections. Following collection, cross-correlations were formulated between the literature, received survey responses and my first-hand witness accounts.

Conclusion

My methodological approach was predominantly qualitative and thematic. This decision was in accordance with feminist aims to better understand a hashtag social movement by centring the voices of those actively taking part. A mixed methods collection strategy enabled both, statistically significant patterns, and expressive and open-ended explanations to be gathered. This well-rounded and robust approach was essential to documenting why Instagram signified an empowerment source to BPM hashtaggers.

The capture of descriptive data was vital to expand the existing knowledge base regarding a developing feminist fourth wave. My research was not merely interested in seeking close-ended confirmation whether Instagrammers identified with 'activist' or 'feminist' labels. This social media study wanted to go a step further and gather experiential feedback relaying how and why networked advocacy is being mobilised. The presence of a selfie alone cannot convey if it possesses underlying political intent. It is only the picture-takers, not the pictures, that can talk back and fourth-wave feminism is frequently characterised by an outspoken 'call out' culture (Risam, 2015; Wray & Day, 2018, p.116).

By situating data collection at the site of protest - both, online and offline - access to 'activist wisdom' (Maddison & Scalmer, 2006) could be attained and lived realities imparted regarding participation in a current and relevant hashtag movement. Survey sample selection was carried out based on hashtag use, and not followers, to 'upend hegemonic hierarchies of visibility' and foster greater inclusion by incorporating 'non-celebrity' participants (Caldeira, et al., 2020, p.1). As discussed, previous studies have overemphasised 'trending' and influencer Instagram accounts, meaning the critical link between how the 'mundane' and the 'political' overlap in performative self-representation is missed (Caldeira, et al., 2020, p.1). This chapter provided a detailed justification behind choosing to supplement survey data with offline participant observation statements. This was a research design decision made in order to witness first-hand if, and where,

BPM protest logics encompass physical offline spaces.

Preceding chapters have explored how so-called fourth-wave feminism appears to be continuing the traditional alignment of the personal (profile) being political. Feminist prioritisation of personal testimonies continues to be upheld throughout this project. I believe that the methodological design detailed throughout this chapter provides the most effective means of presenting enlightening anecdotal collective BPM protest positions, wherein intersectional voices are amplified. The next chapter shifts the focus from data collection to the consolidation of data analysis. The following three chapters present the findings generated via my methodological strategy. Chapter Five begins this process by assessing if the outwardly appearing intersectional orientation of the BPM is reflected in the participant profile generated through my research.

Chapter 5: Fourth-Wave Feminism: Analysing Digital Exclusion

Introduction

The BPM outwardly prides itself on intersectional advocation for body diversity and inclusion; a values system reflected through the movement's 'All Bodies are Good Bodies' slogan. As discussed in Chapter One, fourth-wave feminism is frequently defined by its virtual delivery and intersectional outlook. To quote feminist writer, Laurie Penny (2018, p.124) fourth-wave feminism is thought to be 'digital, intersectional, globally connected and mad as hell.' However, throughout Chapter Three, an evaluation of existing literature suggested that the BPM was making people 'mad as hell' amidst allegations of whitewashing and a failure to practice what it preached. My subsequent social media research discovered that although the majority of #BodyPositive Instagrammers self-identified as fourth-wave feminists, this was a fourth-wave feminism fraught with fault lines.

This chapter is the first of three chapters focusing on my research findings. A key research objective was to develop an intersectional understanding of the BPM through charting the distribution of political activism and agency by building a participant profile. This chapter begins by drawing out statistically significant patterns in engagement rates, derived from socio-demographic identifiers. Doing so is crucial to the analysis of who possesses the agency to engage in exhibitionist empowerment, as activism, on Instagram. My fieldwork aimed to assess what bodies were gaining visibility, and therefore traction, as part of BPM image events advocating increased representation of fat female corporeality.

BoPo Warriors believe that to be seen is to be heard, performative protest literally puts fat-positive femininities in the picture, and into public consciousness. Chapter Five engages with how visibility was found to be a luxury that is selectively afforded in our 'looks-based' society (Widdows, 2018, p.154). Across preceding chapters, I have explored the presence of fatphobic and racist structures within previous waves of feminist activism. My findings suggest that these prejudicial patterns continue to permeate

fourth-wave feminism's digitised protest sites.

This chapter explores the user-confided realities behind the virtual reality. Chapter Two examined the work of techno-optimist scholars, such as Manuel Castells, who commonly align SNSs with increased democratisation. The findings set out in the following sections make an evidence-based interjection. A blind spot was found in techno-optimistic thinking, which fails to appreciate how the internet not only bestows newfound narrative freedoms but reinforces existing inequalities. Critical discussions place Instagram feminism under scrutiny by stipulating who the insiders and outsiders are within its networked structures of exclusion.

Profiling BPM Participants

This chapter provides an overview of core attributes refined during thematic analysis. An underlying objective focused on the need to build a participant profile, charting socio-demographic characteristics, within the BPM. This was a task undertaken to empirically assess how activism and agency were distributed across different groups online. The following section provides a concise appraisal of the profile data to establish a collective identity. Thereafter, an analysis of the data teases out the core themes and in doing so places the spotlight on those occupying the side-lines of social media advocacy. Emphasis is granted to the role race relations play in the invisibility experienced by BWOC, as part of fourth-wave feminism.

This approach is informed by Hawtin & Percy-Smith's (2007) guidance regarding the presentation of research findings. They advise that when dealing with big data it is only feasible to prioritise responses that are instrumental to addressing research questions. This is a case in point with regards to my online survey and participant observation data. Across the following sections, key relationships are isolated that make significant contributions to debate about virtual empowerment practices.

From the 500 Instagrammers that responded to the gender question, 472 (94.3%) of them identified as female. The fact most BPM members are female was not revelatory. Similarly, age distribution figures predictably revealed most new media users to be from younger demographics (See Fig. 5.1). Only TikTok, which launched in 2016, currently rivals Instagram in terms of being the most innovative and youth-savvy SNS. The majority (54.3%, n=260) of BPM hashtaggers belonged to the 25-34 years bracket, with the optimum age for participation being 29 years (n=37).

Fig. 5.1
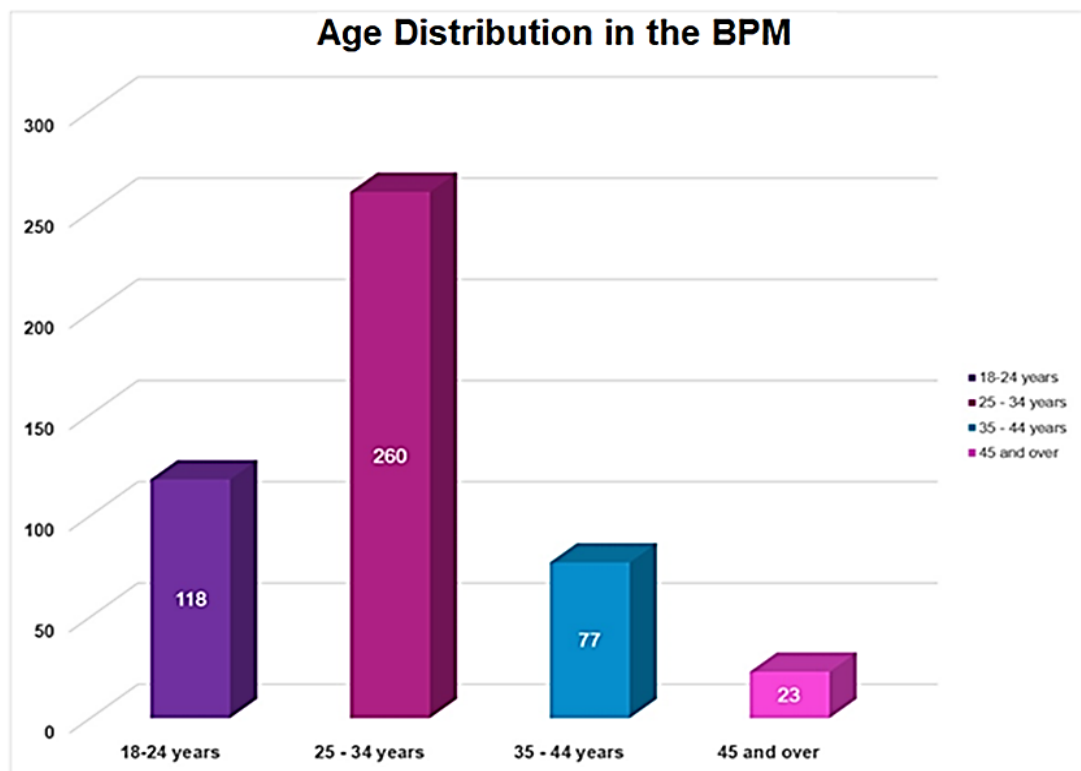
Once coupled with qualitative survey testimonies, however, the fact that a downturn in participation occurred from the mid-forties age group onwards became statistically significant. Sophie indicated she experienced empowerment from the BPM:

> *I found a plus size blog while googling for plus size dresses. I read plus size blogs for about a year before I jumped in and made my own blog as I felt so empowered.*

> (Sophie, 46, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

This sense of empowerment was achieved by posting bikini selfies because gaining visibility for mature women was important to Sophie:

> *It shows women of my age and size that you don't have to hide away, or disappear.*

Quality of life gains aside, she did still feel that the dominance of certain demographics signified a major drawback:

> *Body positivity has become overrun with young slim white women who have to crunch over to have any visible fat rolls. I'm not represented in that, but I represent myself by using Instagram.*

Such descriptive qualitative data pinpointed the white, thin and young as being overrepresented in the BPM. This was a sentiment reinforced by others who voiced criticality towards the virtual protest environment:

> *I am over 40 and have VBO, sometimes this movement can be very young and more celebratory of a traditional standards of beauty (weight held in bust, bottom/thighs).*

> (Lydia, 40, white, female, 4WF, America)

The dominance of these groups was generally further supported across my accompanying quantitative data collection.

Open-ended survey responses revealed that older women were sometimes prone to self-imposing a state of digital exclusion motivated by differences in intergenerational outlook. Some respondents conceded the openness of Instagram's populist protest styles is not for everybody:

> *There are older women, for whom it is taboo, for example to talk about eating disorders or the topic of emotional eating or mental disorders as part of a disturbed eating behavior.*

> (Sabine, 30, white, female, Germany)

It is worth remembering that empowerment is not monolithically expressed or experienced. In studying hashtag feminism about abortion rights, Myles (2019, p.511) noted how networked advocacy demands 'use of first-person narratives' plus levels of 'personal and highly visible engagement.' The relinquishment of personal privacy and degree of self-exposure associated with SNSs was found to alienate older activists. This finding supports earlier

studies suggesting that a 'grey divide' can exist in mainstream feminism when older internet users are less active and skilled with digital media than younger users (Quan-Haase, et al., 2018, p.22).

Schuster (2013, p.18) raised concerns about this intergenerational dissonance leading to the occurrence of 'invisible feminists,' whereby older activists gradually become alienated and detached from the trending 'political energies' young women expel on SNSs. This intergenerational discordance within the feminist movement is nothing new and predates screen-based women's liberation efforts. As observable in the so-called 'sex wars,' that developed between 1970s second-wave anti-pornography feminists (Dworkin, 1974; 1981; Griffin, 1981; MacKinnon, 1989) and third-wave feminists who supported sex worker rights and resented 'victim feminisms' that went before (Kanagawa, 2009; Whelan, 2017).

This issue regarding the placement of scantily clad female subjects in front of a camera has retrospectively proven divisive within the movement. The feminist protest trajectory has deviated somewhat since second-wave resistance against the 1970 Miss World beauty contest (See Fig. 5.2). This flashpoint defied lookism by arguing: 'We are not beautiful. We are not ugly… We are angry,' whereas current fourth-wave feminism is founded on looks to camera. A perspective presented by Polly Vernon (2015, p.3) in defining the 'hot feminist':

> One who cares greatly about the way she looks and greatly about the rights of women, feels that neither concern is compromised by the other… She views her own intrinsic sexiness not as an impediment to her feminist politics – but, rather, as its rocket fuel.

Previously, WLM demonstrations argued for the end of 'the man's making money out of our bodies.' My data showed that these tensions pervade in relation to hashtag manifestations. Fast forward to fifty years later and women continue to parade, photograph and upload their bodies to a platform for the financial benefit of male profiteers such as Instagram owner, Mark Zuckerberg. I make an original contribution to knowledge by shedding light on how some demographics are more comfortable than others with

implementing their body as a digitised protest site.
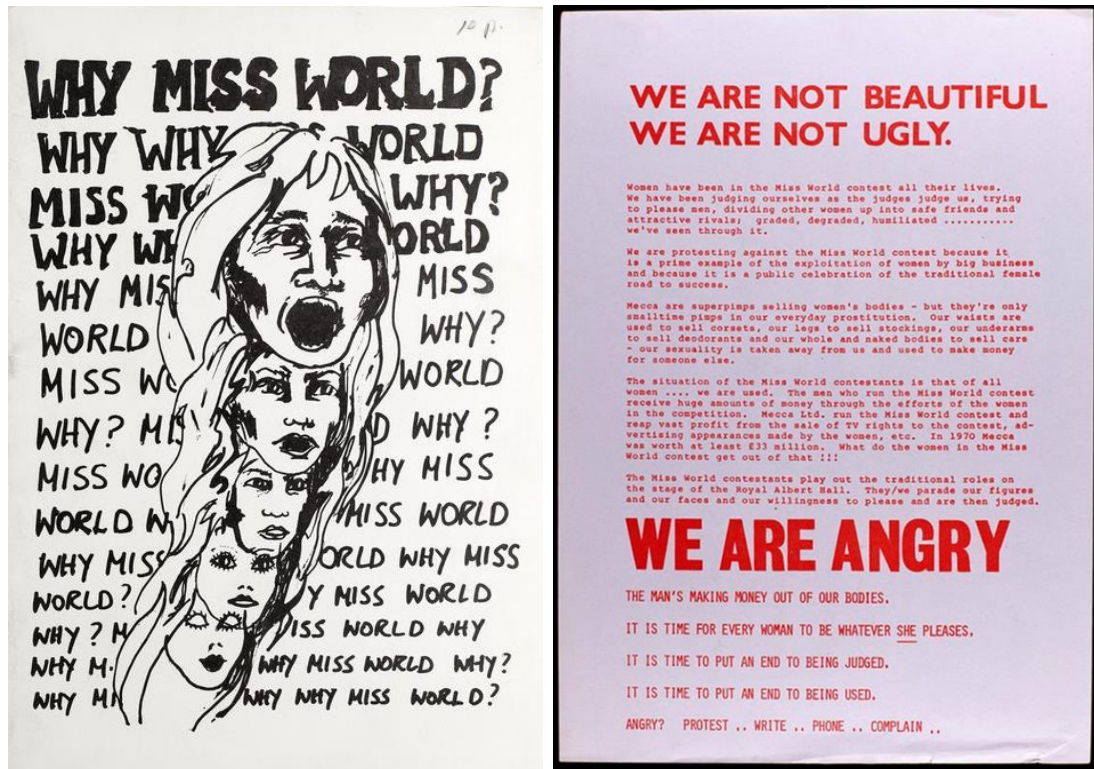
Figure 5.2

Women's liberation posters from 1970 Anti-Miss World demonstrations wanting to 'put an end to being judged.'

Source: John Chesterman Hall-Carpenter Archives, LSE Women's Library, HCA/CHESTERMAN/21

Qualitative testimonies provided valuable enlightenment regarding underlying BPM motives, as Karen indicated she took bikini selfies because:

> *We do not need to be ashamed of the bumps and rolls we have under our clothes. By seeing others this shows us that we are all the same.*

(Karen, 58, white, female, America*)*

Yet once more, Karen offered further insight into why stripping for social change and being emotionally available online may prove difficult for others from her age group:

> *I am 58 so believe my generation is just getting use to "bearing our souls" on social media… I am getting much better at letting my true feelings be known on instagram and just recently started a blog to share my insights.*

My research generates fresh insight into the occurrence of age-based hesitancy to engage in fourth-wave feminist bodily display. This mismatch in preferred mobilisation strategies resonated with comments recently made by 61-year-old co-founder of The Women's Equality Party (WEP), Sandi Toksvig. In a *Sunday Times Magazine* interview, Toksvig confessed: 'I wouldn't diss the younger generations. But something has become, I don't know, glossy about feminism, which I've no time for' (Toksvig quoted in Knight, 2019, p.13).

Documented feelings of digital despondency surrounding fourth-wave feminism add to a longevity of age-based internal conflicts within the WLM. Historically, 'generational differences based on age stratification and perceived political incompatibility' have resulted in disharmony and power struggles (Purvis, 2004, p.93). A lack of cohesivity in vision has created intergenerational strain. Some of these hostilities stem from how third and fourth-wave feminisms migrated collective focus towards 'matters of sexuality and identity' (Purvis, 2004, p.94). Comparatively, former feminist waves commonly concentrated on protesting for social justice gains and quantifiable entitlements, such as voting rights and equal pay.

The BPM is already widely established as a predominantly female community. Nevertheless, results from quantitative data collection demonstrate that there is Western bias. The hashtag network was most heavily concentrated in North America (47.4%, n=237), closely followed by substantial European support (40.2%, n=201). Amongst the least proactive continents were Africa (1.4%, n=7), South America (1.6%, n=8) and Asia (2%, n=10). The ability to comprehensively assess the span of a global movement was inevitably limited by adopting a monolingual English-speaking approach to capturing.

Cultural differences were found to mediate the transferability of exhibitionist empowerment, as many religious customs incorporate skin covering. My survey sample was compiled from users responsible for publishing a 'public' Instagram post. This meant that those raised with more reserved traditions,

for example, users who may simply prefer to read others' posts, or post on 'private' status, were underrepresented. Some participants reported that an introverted demeanour was informed by their heritage:

> *I am Asian, and it is not in our culture to complain abt our own problems. And becoz of that, we aren't represented at all.*

(Mei, 20, Chinese, female, Europe)

In her study of Indian feminist activism, Shruti Jain (2020, p.1) praised 'the rising fourth wave,' deployed through digital platforms, as a means to overcome exclusionary preceding waves that often grew 'within a limited Western upper-class psyche, based on their own challenges and needs.' Therefore, this data surrounding the concentrated geographic distribution of the BPM was noteworthy.

The westernisation of body positivity was perceived to be problematic and counterproductive to its objectives by those taking part:

> *As a Chinese person I feel that we are underrepresented in body positivity, but as a thin, straight, cishet woman I feel that I am overrepresented…*
>
> *I can definitely see how the focus on the body can be seen as objectifying, or be misinterpreted to mean "feeling positive about the body all the time". I think different terms are going to resonate with different people.*

(Fen, 33, Chinese, female, 4WF, America)

My online survey captured the frustration felt by those attempting to mobilise an intersectional fourth-wave feminism driven by a focus on diversity and identity politics. BPM members attested that the movement had been 'harmed' by its inability to centre the marginalised body types and identities it is supposed to serve:

> *The intention of BoPo is to reject eurocentric, thin, able bodies as the bodily ideal and create space for the representation of all bodies and identities. (but fails to achieve it)*

(Melanie, 30, white, female, 4WF, New Zealand)

Moreover, gender and location data took on a renewed relevance when coupled with ethnic identifiers, as most participants were found to be white

Western women (See Fig 5.3).

Fig. 5.3

Ethnicity in the Body Positive Movement (BPM)

- Asian (16)
- Black (32)
- Mixed (55)
- Other (15)
- White (382)

3% | 6% | 11% | 3% | 77%

n=500
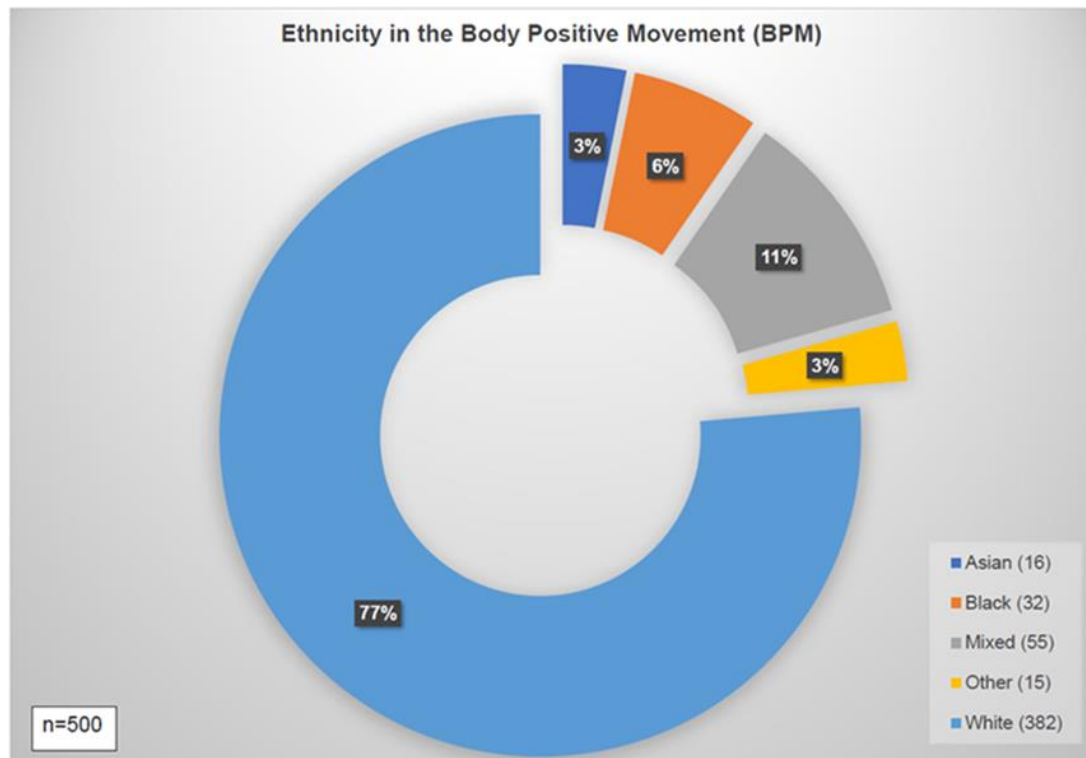
This finding is consistent with existing literature explored in Chapter Three such as Alentola's (2017, p.28) earlier denouncement that the BPM was a 'movement of white women.' Three years later, my research revisited this area of concern and found little evidence of improvement. My survey data showed that 77% (n=382) of BPM Instagrammers were white. In comparison, POC were extremely underrepresented. Just 11% (n=55) were mixed-race, 6% (n=32) were black, while 3% respectively were of Asian (n=16) or other (n=15) ethnic identity. The dataset suggested that the BPM was reproducing prevailing hegemonic beauty hierarchies, as opposed to disrupting them. The meme matter of BPM Instagrammers may contain claims-making for body diversity, yet these principles did not translate into the composition of the movement's participant profile.

Experiential accounts described how empowerment is generated from reclaiming narrative ownership over black femininities:

> *I got annoyed about people in real life + online idealising how a woman "should" be 'pretty' and as the rebellious person I am I started a page to completely go against that ideal.*

(Mia, 19, black, female, 4WF, Europe)

Nevertheless, Mia added that fourth-wave feminism was failing in its mission to promote plural feminisms:

> *I don't see many people of colour in the body positive movement.*

Survey data supported claims from BWOC (Yeboah, 2017), previously introduced in Chapter Three, suggesting the existence of whitewashing within the BPM. Consequently, tension was evident between fourth-wave feminism's outwardly intersectional pretences and the hashtivist protest reality.

Across my literature review, extensive consideration was granted to dually oppressive racist-sexist societal structures. Their interference has historically meant that black fat women have possessed little autonomy over their own body mediations. My survey evidenced that BWOC were seizing the editorial control of SNSs to formulate feminist counternarratives. Such digital behaviours are in keeping with feminist historian standpoints discussed in Chapter One. For example, Beaumont (2013, p.3) has argued that feminist political activism can reside wherever activism attempts to improve the status of women. Qualitative data provided valuable protestor perspectives into how Instagram usage empowered women because positive re-representation could be proactively garnered:

> *I vanpost my own images and tell my own stories. There is already a lot of negative news and stereotypes spread about African American women and especially plus sized African American women. This allows me to tell and share my own stories and to give a more holistic view of who I really am.*

(Kelly, 38, black, female, 4WF, America)

Empowerment was experienced when stigmatised bodies could impact their own public narratives. This finding aligns with feminist classifications of 'agency' encountered in existing literature (Takhar, 2013), that prioritise possession of control over one's life trajectory as an essential component.

Despite this, during thematic analysis, significant shared structures of sentiment were present to suggest that white dominance within the BPM's ethnic composition signified a major collective concern. Emotive and expressive feedback was gathered via open-ended survey questioning. One respondent was Rachel who wears UK size 18-20 clothing and has maintained a fat-positive social media presence since the early days of MySpace. President of a Women's Institute (WI)[8], Rachel's social change orientations are vested in dismantling the BMI scale, because of its role enforcing systemic fatphobia. Criticism was however forthcoming on the topic of the movement's erasure of fat BWOC:

> *If it wasn't for fat acceptance, we would not have body positivity. from the victorians to teenagers today. As well as Fat Acceptance, BOPO is not what it is without the fearless fat, black women that helped fight for what it means today. Fat acceptance and positivity is the mother of BOPO…*
>
> *In the community I do feel like your straight size[9] middle class white girls are profiteering, bending over double to create 1 roll of perfectly smooth skin, or wearing something tight to make it look like they have an ounce of fat on them….*
>
> *unfortunatly the BOPO mainstream is a size 16 6ft white woman.*
>
> (Rachel, 28, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

These findings exposed the presence of a disconnect between what fourth-wave feminism practiced and what it preached. Such black underrepresentation corresponds with Mikki Kendall's criticisms, in *Hood Feminism* (2020, pp.vii-viii), that feminism pays 'more lip service than actual service to equality.'

By initiating a subject-centred dialogue, active BPM hashtaggers confided that this resonated with their lived experience of the movement's somewhat contradictory narrow range of constituents:

---

[8] The Women's Institute is a grassroots volunteer organisation that has branches across the UK. Groups meet to advance the education and empowerment of women through cultural pursuits such as agriculture, crafts and social welfare.

[9] 'Straight size' is a term used to describe those who can access clothing from mainstream high street collections.

> *until the movement centers fat Black women, femmes, and men, it's not inclusive*

> (Sidney, 30, African, non-binary, America)

As previously discussed, fourth-wave feminism is characterised by intersectional concern for multicultural empowerment. Shiva & Nosrat Kharazmi (2019, p.219) theorise that fourth-wave feminism can be defined by its 'attempt to rectify the failings of past waves by representing those oppressed by multiple institutions such as sexism, classism, and racism.' My dataset proposed theory had failed to translate into protest activity.

Rather than offering the solution to prejudicial beauty standards, by normalising exposure to non-conforming body types, the BPM was often implicated as part of the problem. For instance, Benita felt compelled to thrust her body into the public eye and show it was possible to be fat and happy. Nonetheless, she described how this decision was not only provoked by a lack of representation in mainstream media, but within the BPM itself:

> *I don't see any women like me in the mainstream media so I have to put myself out there…*

> *That is why I started an Instagram, I wasn't seeing any queer Women of Colour in the body positivity community*

> (Benita, 31, mixed-race, female, Europe)

Survey data presenting the skewed racial composition of the BPM was particularly disconcerting.

The overwhelming whiteness of the BPM provoked numerous discussion points. Firstly, body positivity was supposedly ideologically premised to elevate marginalised populations. Secondly, hashtag campaign offshoots from so-called fourth-wave feminism professed to avoid imposing a homogenising and universalised outlook. Thirdly, BWOC occupy a proactive protest identity, as frontrunners, when it comes to lobbying via SNSs for other social justice causes (e.g., #BlackGirlMagic). Knight Steele (2021) most recently positioned WOC at the forefront of a deep-rooted black feminist technoculture, predating Twitter and Instagram, evidenced from the

outset of the most rudimentary screen media. However, Chapter Three highlighted past studies identifying an underrepresentation of black women within the BPM movement (Alentola, 2017; Cohen, et al., 2019a; Johansson, 2020). My research progresses critical discussion by gauging possible contributors when it comes to the (in)visibility of WOC in expressions of fourth-wave feminism.

Women of Colour (WOC)

Aside from building a participant profile, another overarching research aim was to assess whether #BodyPositive hashtaggers considered their digital interactions to be expressions of 'feminist' political protest. Once data collection commenced it became apparent why it is empirically unreliable to assume all women who use a hashtag connected with a cause identify as hashtag feminists. I found that feminist label self-ascription could serve as a source of digital exclusion. Data showed that affiliation with feminism posed an incredibly complex and divisive issue for some populations.

Fig. 5.4

In 2013, Kira Cochrane announced the rise of a 'fourth wave of rebel women' enabled through the internet, where she says a feminist 'awakening' has occurred. Do you see your body positive social media activity as part of this alleged 'fourth wave' of feminism?

Yes	317 (64.6%)
No	174 (35.4%)
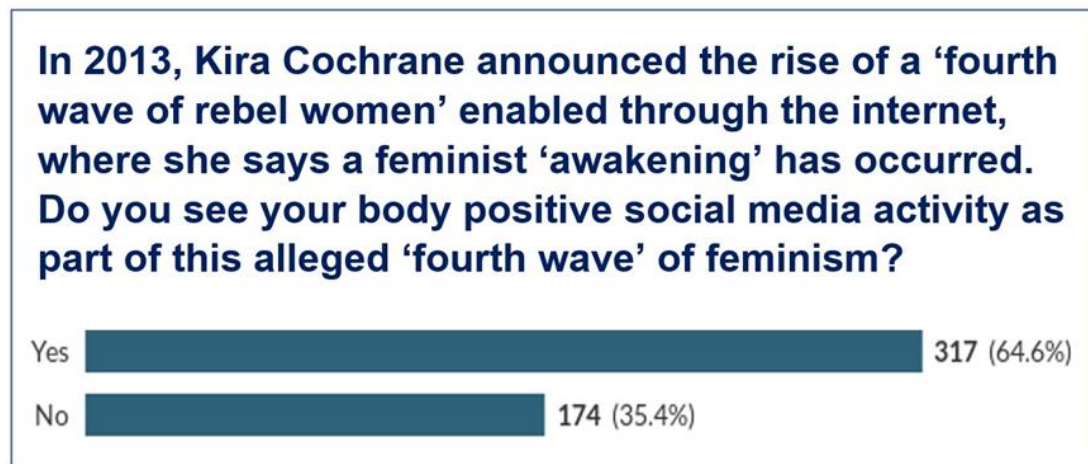
My opening chapter examined Kira Cochrane's (2013a; 2013b) claims that the internet was responsible for a 'feminist' awakening. Women deploying web tools in their masses were said to represent a 'fourth wave' networked rebellion (Cochrane 2013a; 2013b). In response, my survey interrogated members from a predominantly female hashtagger network to verify these acclamations. Instagram users were surveyed as to whether they

considered their body positive social media to be part of this internet-enabled alleged feminist fourth wave (Chamberlain, 2017; Rivers, 2017). From the 491 BPM hashtaggers that responded to the question, the majority (64.6% n=317) confirmed that they categorised their Instagram activity as part of a purported fourth wave of feminist rebel women (See Fig. 5.4).

This finding confirms scholarly proclamations that hashtag feminism has 'exploded as the driving force of feminism' maximised by 'millennial activists' to address the 'unfinished gender revolution' (Crossley, 2017, p.97). Many respondents readily placed the gender equality and body positivity causes in unquestionable alignment:

> *The body positive movement is rooted in the patriarchy's policing of female bodies. It would be impossible to not include body positivity in the 4th wave of feminism.*

> (Michelle, 29, mixed-race, female, 4WF, America)

Following early experiences with body dysmorphia, Michelle now uses Instagram to resist thin privilege, manifest through health care provision and unaccommodating airplane seating. Michelle views claims-making for size inclusivity and the humane treatment of fat people as 'feminist' action because it aims to deliver clear quality-of-life gains for women.

Likewise, when questioned, most #BodyPositive Instagrammers agreed (63.4%, n=312) that hashtagging symbolised a 'feminist act' to them (See Fig. 5.5). My empirical evidence base confirmed that the majority of those using so-called fourth-wave feminist tools (e.g., hashtags, memes and selfies) identified as fourth-wave 'feminists.' My study brings feminist scholarship up-to-date in this regard; Guillard (2016, p.609) previously deemed feminism to be 'trending' on older application, Tumblr as a 'conduit for civic engagement.' Several years later, my dataset confirms that these gendered patterns of political exchange have transferred to a newer platform, Instagram. Nevertheless, there was a need to apply caution in the reading of these results. Feminist self-identification did not by any means denote an unequivocal consensus position.

Fig. 5.5

My use of a body positive hashtag is a feminist act.

Agree — 312 (63.4%)

Disagree — 141 (28.7%)

Don't Know — 39 (7.9%)
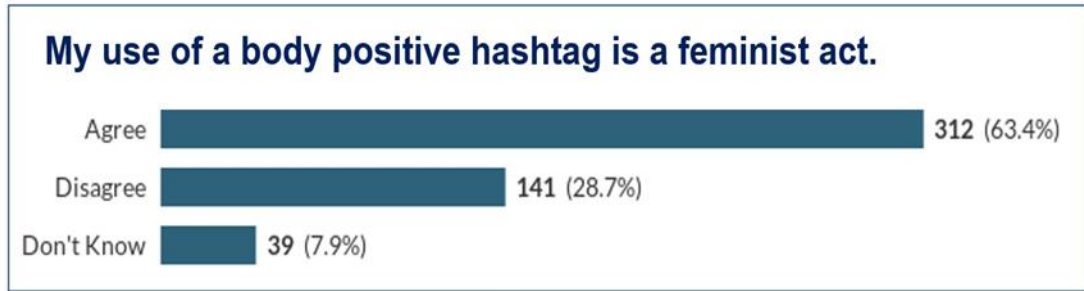
Many testimonials explicitly claimed Instagram as a site for the 'sisterhood' to share struggle and build solidarity. Hashtags were said to help facilitate social change by amassing oppositional collective units against narrow beauty ideologies:

> *Even though it's online and I haven't met many women I interact with, I feel like I am part of a community, a sisterhood, where we are all fighting the same battle and support each other.*

(Ava, 28, white, female, 4WF, Europe)

However, a historic shortcoming of the 'sisterhood' resides with the feminist movement's tendency to do precisely this, assume that everybody is 'fighting the same battle.' A universalism that suppresses the intersectional nuances attached to the activism and agency of those from less dominant groups. Or as Audre Lorde (2019, p.116) most poignantly observed: 'There is a pretense [sic] to homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist.'

As discussed in Chapter Two, the feminist sisterhood has been criticised for asserting a white worldview, whereby self-interest of the powerful is prioritised over acts of allyship towards those occupying identities with different axes of intersectional oppression (Stevenson, 2019). Simons (1979, p.384) most notably declared racism to be the 'schism in the sisterhood,' after the WLM struggled to 'expand beyond its white middle-class membership base and become an intercultural, international movement.' Fourth-wave feminism, with its instant connectivity, worldwide reach and user-generated opportunities for 'shouting back' held vast promise

to finally achieve this (Turley & Fisher, 2018, p.128). Unfortunately, despite fourth-wave feminism being conducted on global SNSs, it still did not appear to achieve a global multicultural outlook.

My dataset confirmed that the majority of BPM hashtaggers identified as hashtag feminists, yet the majority of my survey respondents were also white (77%, n=382). Beck (2021) underlines the importance of focusing on how 'from the suffragettes to the influencers' white feminism has, and continues to, leave certain populations behind. The generation of a participant profile presented how the agency of WOC was not being expressed within intersectional fourth-wave feminist spaces. It was being hushed within white feminist Instagram spaces. In response to previous claims regarding mainstream feminism's exclusionary tendencies, theorists queried whether women's liberation was 'for whites only,' noting that the more white dominated organising is perceived to be, the more hesitant BWOC will be to get involved (Torrey, 1979, p.281). Therefore, hegemonic white feminism within the BPM, surfaced as an impediment to the activism and agency of WOC, as already existing bias was recreated in digital domains.

Scholarship from WOC advocates that fourth-wave feminism should be collaborated with an intersectional orientation to account for the way an individual's life chances can alter in accordance with identity characteristics (Okolosie, 2014). Consequently, for hashtag feminism to be politically progressive and learn from previous activism's shortcomings, it needs to make room for race and how racial identity intercedes experiences of empowerment. Black feminism originated as part of civil rights activity and later played a significant role in the WLM (Ringrose, 2007); contemporary black feminist writers claim it continues to thrive today 'from tweets to the streets' (Jones, 2019, p.42). Nevertheless, under analysis, new media Instagram feminism appeared to echo problematic traits that besieged preceding protest cycles. My survey amassed evidence to suggest that BWOC continued to see themselves as existing 'outside of' and 'othered' by the feminist movement (Olufemi, 2020, p.12).

Instagrammers, such as Cara, believe there are life enhancing properties behind 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004) because excluded women can start to feel 'comfortable' through cathartic photographic processes of enhanced visibility. From her perspective however, tensions arose from BWOC's inability to access this beneficial visibility:

> *Im a fat black woman with a visible and invisible chronic illness. The movement is for white average size women to feel empowered…*
>
> *I'm just speaking my truth. It's not an act of rebellion or feminism.*
>
> (Cara, 35, black, female, America)

Survey findings suggested that historic racialised rejection of the feminist movement had extended into hashtag feminism. In Chapter One, an analysis of the literature detailed that previous feminist waves had failed to establish an 'interracial feminism' (Breines, 2007, p.21). A fractious past reflected in the work of black theorists, such as Alice Walker (1983), who chose to reject feminist identification in exchange for being 'womanist.' A decision taken on the basis that internal power hierarchies within feminism were seen to suppress activism and agency from the perspective of the racialised other (Hill Collins, 2000, pp.12-13).

In addition, during 1981, bell hooks published, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, critiquing the feminist movement for being predominantly white and middle-upper class. Subsequently, the 1970s 'second-wave' sisterhood encountered low uptake when engaging in outreach with BWOC, a recruitment deficit created by this devaluation of black femininity. Significant crossover surfaced in my dataset through frustrations felt:

> *if it includes black women it is light skin black women*
> (Toni, 22, African, female, 4WF, Europe)

Chapter Three explored how sexism and racism are simultaneously structurally imposed when black bodies are merely revered for their proximity to whiteness (Cox, 2020, p.7). Throughout my dataset, old feminisms

overlapped with new media feminisms, whereby the past informed present-day protest patterns. An intersectional feminism recognises that layers of identity differentiation impart privilege and oppression in accordance with contextual power relations (Frankenberg, 1993). Data illustrated that digital exclusion was experienced by WOC when white protest identities were overwhelmingly expressed to the suppression of transmitting alternative activist realities.

BWOC who are avid selfie-takers and frequently instrumentalise Instagram to reject the racialised 'thick' culture, discussed in Chapter Three, admit:

> *It is simply not the same for fat black women in the body positive movement. Just like it isn't the same for black women in the feminist movement.*

> (Frankie, 23, black, female, 4WF, America)

A dominant theme pinpointed to help explain rates of black underrepresentation was the contentious relationship some members from the BPM demonstrated towards feminist identification. Whitewashing understandably makes the 'feminist' cause unappealing and redundant of a sense of belonging to othered races. Consequently, the feminist label surfaced as a contentious barrier to participation, with WOC vocalising a reluctance to affiliate.

Florence has an established history of promoting body positivity online, since she first started to do so on early SNS, Tumblr. She currently uses Instagram to reject diet culture and this activist aim is fulfilled by:

> *allowing more people to see fat bodies in a positive light*
> (Florence, 29, mixed-race, female, 4WF, Europe)

The activism and agency of BPM members was apparent through these purposive efforts to grant maligned bodies affirmative representation and confer visibility, via norm-defiant content creation. Although, in more recent years, Florence admitted that she had come to question the inclusivity of the BPM:

> *It has been widely co-opted by thinner or straight sized white women, which do not experience the systematic marginalization and violence experienced by actual fat women, particularly fat black women who actually started the movement so the community has been split…*
>
> *I am a middle sized, white fat woman with a generally hourglass shape so my body type has not been excluded from the movement as much as larger, black and women of color.*

By losing sight of BWOC, both, the BPM and fourth-wave feminism were perceived to be losing their intersectional political principles. As Jessica Ringrose argues, black feminism 'cannot be an add-on' and the politics of intersectional location 'need to be an integral part of our scholarship if we are going to have politically relevant scholarship' (Ringrose cited in Ali, et al., 2010, p.647).

The hegemonic whiteness of a hashtag movement reputedly organising to redress a lack of body diversity, facilitated on a platform much relied upon to host intersectional internet feminisms, was a significant finding. In Chapter One, my research problem recognised the feminist 'sisterhood' has retrospectively been subjected to considerable criticism regarding its white-centric orientation (Eddo-Lodge, 2018). Fourth-wave feminist networked platforms were comparably situated as sites of replication, rather than resistance, within my dataset:

> *Nowadays body positivity is nothing more than white feminism with no regards for those people who are stigmatised and not represented. It's not about fighting the beauty standards as an oppressive tool of patriarchy. It is about affirming the right to feel beautiful and self-love, but self-love and beauty will not destroy the stigma.*

(Greta, 33, white, female, 4WF, Italy)

Contrary to literary definitions, BPM Instagrammers voiced disenchantment towards the lack of engagement with intersectionality observed in hashtag feminist spaces.

Black feminist writer, Lola Olufemi (2020, pp.4-5) reminds, 'feminist work is justice work,' while in contrast, an evolving wave of individualist 'white feminist neo-liberal politics' simply serves as 'a vehicle for self-improvement' mounting 'no challenge to hegemony, only acquiescence.' Many women

surveyed were reluctant to formally lend themselves to a 'feminist' cause dogged by historically exclusionary propensities. My survey found that an established underrepresentation of fat WOC had particularly motivated many hashtaggers to opt out of feminist movement classification altogether. Respondents countlessly accused feminism of working against the interests of elevating black fat agency:

> *I do not classify myself as a feminist and try to distance myself from that label/movement. I believe in equality amongst the sexes, but the feminist movement does not seem to be promoting that and instead contributing to more issues in society, and calling for the oppression of men as opposed to empowering women. I feel as though the feminist movement also oppresses other women with different viewpoints…*
>
> *It seems to spread the wrong message to me. It seems to say that the only way you can be body positive is if you show off your body and in ways that aren't necessarily appropriate in my opinion.*
>
> (Hollie, 29, white, female, America)

The motivations behind disengagement from feminist allegiance were coded from survey responses. A major issue with fourth-wave feminism was the way it prescribes bodily display, as a main means of achieving empowerment, often at the expense of less extroverted modes of expression (Rivers, 2017).

The advent of 'girl power' feminism (Ringrose & Renold, 2012), characterised by Western white women posting provocative 'empowering' body portraiture (Bae, 2011, p.28), diverts attention from unceremonious, yet serious, activism. For example, instances of fully-clothed advocation against female genital mutilation (FGM) or for abortion rights, both being body issues that have substantial real-world impact on global female populations (Freeman, 2016). This will be explored in more depth across the following sections.

Fourth-Wave Flesh

A chief problem with the dominance of white feminism is how it can assert this Western bias over the movement's choice of core mobilisation strategies. Saad (2020) advises that the dismantling of white supremist structures can be undertaken by appreciating how 'anti-Blackness' subtly

manifests in everyday exchanges and interactions. For instance, my findings suggest that white-centred networked shows of body exhibitionism can exclude those belonging to certain religions and faith groups. Many active hashtaggers were comfortable with the body's instrumental role in performative picture-based protest on Instagram.

One such standpoint can be witnessed in survey feedback conveying the casualness with which millennial audiences can approach public nudity:

> *I personally believe that nudity on Instagram is rather a symptom of our times. We grew up as the first generation with pornographic content that are always available everywhere. That also had a huge impact on our aesthetic find and so I think it only makes sense as a consequence that you see a lot of bare skin on Instagram. On the one hand there is the faction of self-optimization and on the other hand there is the faction that wants to show that they also have bacon rolls.*

> (Lexie, 30, white, female, Germany)

Within the BPM, the exposure of flesh is vigorously promoted as a primary modality for social change claims-making. To quote Kristen Sollėe (2015, np): 'the 4th wave relies on this visual representation of diversity to thrive,' plus an onus on body positivity is often supplemented with sex positivity. Real-life examples can be observed in Figure 5.6, which features self-portraiture posted by Instagrammers.

The BPM is a visual protest outfit and, in turn, nude fat female bodies are commonly centred as symbols of proud reclamation (Leboeuf, 2019). Equally, Instagram is a photographic medium and relies on user-generated imagery for message transmission. Survey respondents described the almost unavoidable body exposure commanded when using Instagram as a protest site to reject diet culture:

> *on a medium that only works with pictures and videos, like Instagram, it's quite difficult to post body neutral content, as it's hardly possible to see the person behind the content. while posting a picture of yourself, you obkectify yourself. I see this person on this foto, not the personality, that's impossible.*

> (Eloise, 38, white, female, Europe)

Juno Dawson (2018, p.99) argues in her work, *The Gender Games*, that 'flesh is currency' on the Instagram platform. Dawson (2018, p.99) notes: 'Now they've sounded the death knell of *FHM*, *Nuts* and *Zoo*[10]; you can get all the tits and ass you need, for free, on Instagram.' Dawson (2018, p.99) sums up the online Instagram environment as a 'hotbed of spandex-clad softcore pornography.' These observations call into question Instagram's suitability, as a protest site, across multicultural sensibilities.
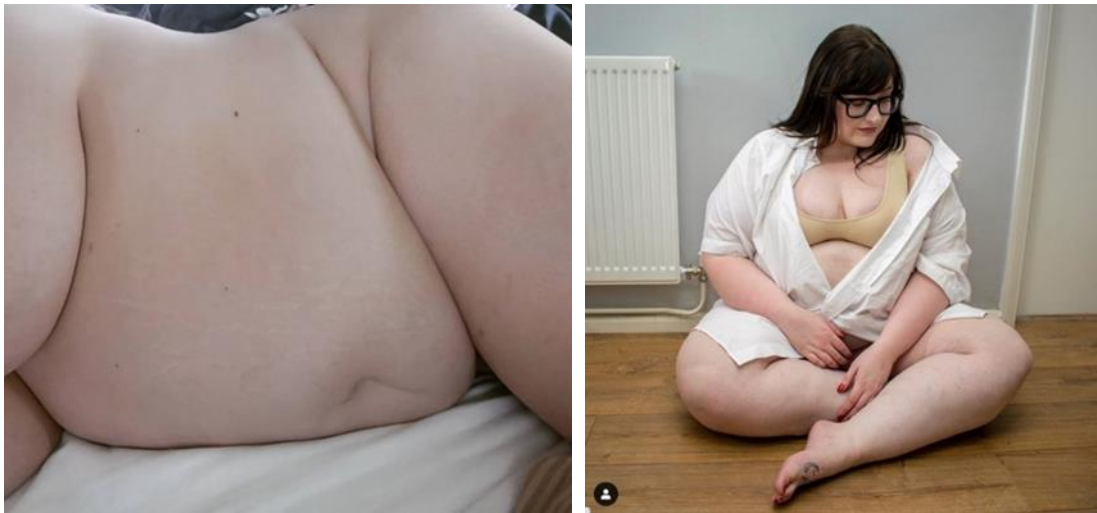
Figure 5.6

Exposed fat female bodies play a pivotal role in selfie-empowerment strategies deployed by BoPo Warriors.

Source: Helene Thyrsted (@_chubbydane) (2020)
Sarah Alexander-Georgeson (@fromsarahlex) (2019)

Both printed with written permission.

Fourth-wave feminism is said to be attentive to intersectional factors. Yet, cross culturally, not all feminists are comfortable with augmenting their activism to conform with this ostentatious climate. Moreover, I was just as interested in the absences when profiling the BPM, as those protesting in front of the lens. To recap, only 3% (n=16) of Instagrammers were of Asian descent (See Fig 5.3). Tao wants to use Instagram to revolt against Asian

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[10] These titles belonged to a genre of men's lifestyle magazines most prevalent in the 1990s, known as 'lad's mags,' combining masculine banter and extensive photo-shoots of nude women in audience offer.

societal obsession with what the 'weighing machine is telling them,' though remarks BPM activity does not culturally translate:

> *Body positivity is super niche in Asia, as we are constantly bombarded by the West Asian culture through social media…*
>
> *the hashtag are widely used by westerns and not so much by the asians side…*
>
> *Heavily usage of bodies to promote the movement is just as good as a watching different sizes of porn with positive message.*
>
> (Tao, 26, Chinese, female, 4WF, Asia)

My data showed that the shift towards what Gill (2007, p.149) deemed a 'postfeminist sensibility,' wherein femininity has become increasingly 'enacted as a bodily property,' is not universally endorsed. When (post)feminism is articulated through embodied resistance, it can also prove 'toxic' to those, who for religious reasons want their skin to remain covered, and in turn undermines 'intersectional solidarity' (Thelandersson, 2014, p.527). Survey data accentuated that not all hashtaggers support the performative pornification of fourth-wave feminist protest, meaning its preferred delivery method can pose a significant barrier to participation. Beth is a registered dietician who wishes to use Instagram to resist weight fixation, but has become disconcerted by how fleshy empowerment strategies conflict with her faith:

> *I am disinterested in nude photos of any bodies and see it as body positive's rogue movement to increase engagement and provoke interest through sexuality and shock value. I'd like to see, across the board, less nudity to increase engagement and interest. This idea could merger with other conservative and religious beliefs I hold.*
>
> (Beth, 28, white, female, America)

Qualitative survey testimonies illuminated how digital exclusion was experienced by those attempting to uphold religious traditions.

The act of disrobing the female body is not unequivocally accepted as an 'empowerment' strategy across cultures. For example, Goehring's (2019, p.26) study into online Muslim feminisms emphasised how hijab-wearers 'felt

a sense of empowerment in compatibility with their commitment to feminism through the act of wearing the hijab.' This point has been made by Instagrammers, such as self-described 'women empowerment illustrator,' Lainey Molnar. Figure 5.7 features an Instagram post making the visual argument that empowerment is not unilaterally expressed. Two females are pictured, one white woman exposing a lot of flesh and one WOC wearing a hijab, to demonstrate empowerment can be achieved through adorning head coverings and modesty, as well as through the exhibition of naked flesh.
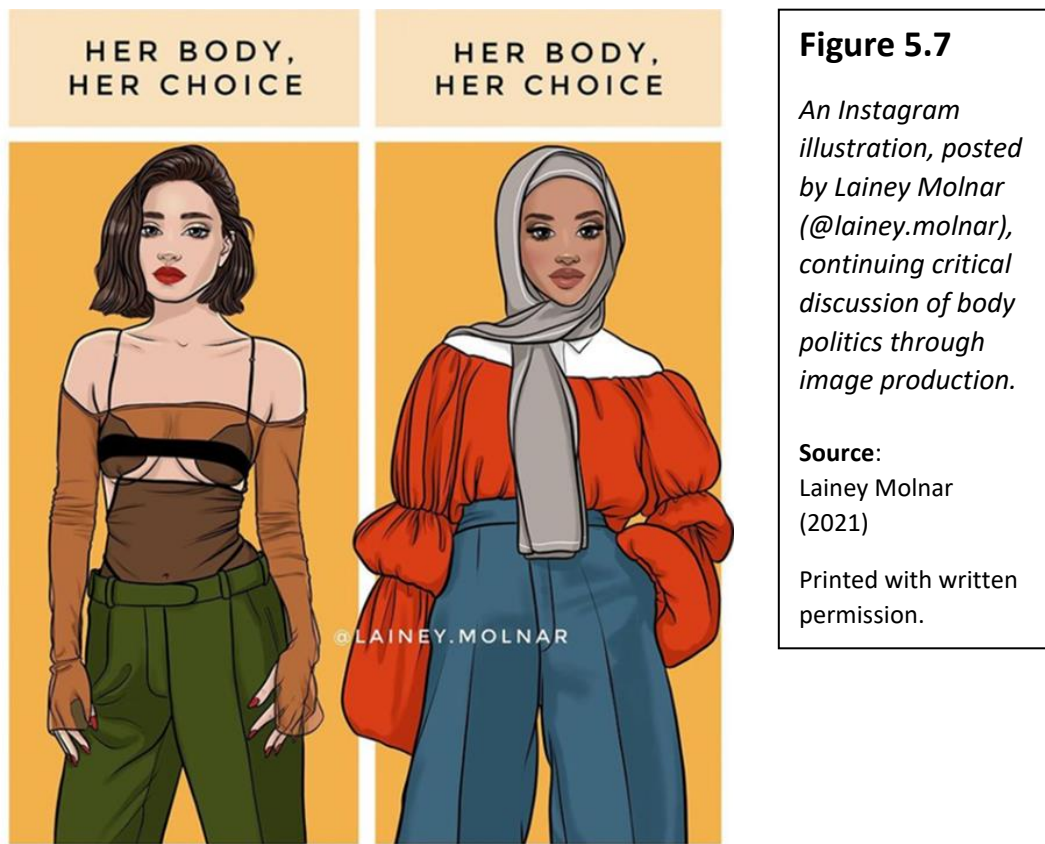
Figure 5.7

An Instagram illustration, posted by Lainey Molnar (@lainey.molnar), continuing critical discussion of body politics through image production.

Source:
Lainey Molnar (2021)

Printed with written permission.

Chapter Two examined how it is difficult to disentangle feminist protest from the body because the omnipresence of gendered anatomical aggressions maintains its status as a social justice concern. The Meira Paibi (woman torchbearer) movement exercised indigenous feminist dissent by publicly disrobing their bodies (Basnet, 2019; Veneracion-Rallonza, 2014). On 15th July 2004, 12 mothers (imas) engaged in self-exposure to make a stand outside the Assam Rifles base after the rape and murder of Manipuri woman, Thangjam Manorama, was committed by members from the Indian Army (Ray, 2018). This collective of middle-aged women staged an embodied

resistance that shamed the men responsible because to quote Bhonsle (2016, np): 'their nakedness, old, haggard, was indescribably sacred.'

Bearing these conflicting subjectivities in mind, one of my leading research objectives is to investigate if BPM visual mobilisation strategies are widely regarded as acts of 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004). This line of enquiry is developed in direct response to concerns raised in the literature. Gill & Elias (2014, p.183) believe LYB discourses become problematic because:

> The body only becomes available to be celebrated and read as beautiful and desirable precisely because of the participant's new confidence and self appreciation – a body love, then, that is both demonstrated and constituted by the ability to put herself on display.

My findings signalled that the potential for multivocality, within fourth-wave feminism, was severely compromised when nudity was overemployed as a mobilisation strategy. Therefore, the only claims-making that attains visibility in the field of protest is that made by those consenting to self-display. This sits at odds with fourth-wave feminist ambitions to develop a cohesive political consciousness, whereby plural feminist outlooks can coexist, and difference can prosper.

Through surveying new knowledge was developed into how body exhibitionism was not experienced as exclusively empowering by all members from the BPM global network. Women documented, via qualitative responses, how virtual rituals clashed with their personal belief systems in some cases. Hannah has a non-conformist body type and although she finds aspects of body positivity commendable, she cannot participate in performative protest:

> *I personally like to be more modest for religious reasons, but I do think that increased exposure to bodies people would not usually see in mainstream media normalizes those bodies to the viewers.*

> (Hannah, 21, white, female, America)

The danger with women's bodies only becoming 'knowable' through 'docile' digital display, is that only participating populations are considered 'worth

knowing' (Murphy, 2013, p.49). If opportunities for empowerment are principally achieved via a singular outlet - i.e., stripping as part of LYB discourses - a universalist feminism is subsequently produced.

Co-optation

Following the undertaking of thematic analysis, collective claims of co-optation were realised and offered yet another indicator as to why BWOC were largely absent from the BPM. Considerable proportions of first-hand data suggested that a proliferation in white women sharing body self-portraiture online is not an act of intersectional feminist protest, but merely an action. For example, Julie dedicates 10-15 hours per week campaigning to:

> *normalise fat bodies and help show other fat women that they should not be ashamed of themselves because weight and worth are not linked.*

> (Julie, 42, white, female, Britain)

Julie considers Instagram a protest site accommodating this connective action. However, Julie indicated her fat acceptance claims-making coexisted alongside apolitical posturing, shifting collective content away from its originally intended purpose:

> *The BoPo movement was never intended for thin cis white women with a bit of gluten bloat to appropriate….*

> *All bodies are good bodies is the same as All lives matter. Of course they are but this isn't your cause, not your campaign. Sure be an ally - of course you can - but don't hijack it and acknowledge where the movement is actually rooted.*

Hashtaggers wanted to develop alliances that valued individual lived experiential difference. Movement co-optation surfaced as a major issue responsible for generating feelings of digital exclusion. This occurrence once again mirrors retrospective race-based tensions, as BWOC were said to be perturbed when second-wave white bourgeois feminists co-opted civil rights movement slogans (Roy, 1996, p.92).

White hegemonic femininities were mutually deemed responsible for hijacking the BPM. In Chapter Three, high-profile BPM advocates, such as

Lizzo, had suggested that BWOC were struggling to attain visibility and my evidence base substantiated these claims. Fat activism was originally inspired through civil rights protest orchestrated by fat POC (Cooper, 2016, p.169). Throughout survey data however, the BPM, in its currently whitewashed digital incarnation, was openly abhorred on the basis of divisive appropriation.

Survey data not only emphasised the BPM's tendency to enact fourth-wave feminism via one selfie-driven protest logic. These strategies to achieve 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004) were also found to be mainly expressed through one body type. Many hashtaggers explicitly identified their Instagram habits as fourth-wave feminist protest activity, whilst also pointing out this was a fourth wave with flaws:

> *Mainstream body positivity ends up being size 8 white women posting pictures in their bikinis and totally misses the point that individuals in marginalized bodies can't just love themselves into being respected.*
>
> (Candice, 30, white, female, 4WF, America)

BPM Instagrammers conveyed the exclusion BWOC were experiencing within a community, initially established by them, to counter invisibility and marginalisation.

In *Fat Activist Vernacular* (2019, np), Cooper dismisses 'Fat Activism vs Body Positivity,' playing any division down as 'The fight of the century. Goodies vs baddies. A false dichotomy.' Nevertheless, numerous survey participants were outraged by perceived appropriation:

> *Body positivity was colonised… It was stolen and taraformed to suit the oppressors Whose bodies were not oppressed, or marginalised, so that they could have one more place that was theirs. This happens to any movement that fat people start….*
>
> *I was sick to my stomach that body positivity which was created by a fat black woman, and a quarter Jewish woman, had been taken away from that people.*
>
> (Cleo, 37, mixed-race, female, America)

Cleo maintained that the most stigmatised groups in society were being 'talked over' in the BPM. A social movement is defined as 'a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society' (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, pp.1217-1218). In contrast, social media content may assimilate an existing order, but social movement activity does not.

Figure 5.8

The now famous Cosmopolitan magazine front cover from October 2018.

Source: Cosmopolitan (2018)

Miller (1999) states co-optation is one of the conditions in the social movement's cycle's final stage of decline. Co-optation relates how a movement's principles become absorbed into mainstream value systems. Many survey participants believed the BPM had reached this concluding stage:

> *I think it's important to clarify that #bopo or fat acceptance is about being treated humanely and equally as our smaller counterparts…*

> *I think body positive is now a gentrified, trending movement that most*

people use to get views and likes. I think most of what we see is mainstream commercialism and the original ideology has been lost.

(Serena, 35, black, female, America)

The abundance of co-optation claims, captured through surveying, are not unfounded. Arguably, the BPM capitulated back in 2018, when *Cosmopolitan* magazine featured plus-size model, Tess Holliday on their front cover (See Fig 5.8). The spectacle was revered as a cultural milestone in size inclusivity (Gowrley, 2019), leading commentators to claim the moment marked the 'peak of body positivity' (Zatat, 2018, np).

Dabiri (2021, p.72) warns of the proneness towards co-option within contemporary identity politics:

> Our articulations of dissent too often mirror the parameters of our oppression, reproducing oppressive systems, unwittingly reinforcing them, or attempting to reverse them, or indeed '*diverse'* them, to make them more '*inclusive'* when in truth they need to dissolve… It is not enough to make exploitative systems more 'inclusive'.

Chapter Three considered Wollstonecraft's (1792) feminist framing of ornamentation as a 'cage' imposed by the patriarchal arrangement of society. An analogy since applied in contemporary criticism of the BPM: 'What is the utility of "body positivity" if it only seeks to provide one with a false sense of confidence rather than to liberate all from that which cages the body?' (Harrison, 2021, p.2). The 'growth' of SNSs is said to have fuelled this neoliberal 'commodity feminism' (Gill & Elias, 2014, p.179). In contrast, activists 'view the social structure as a target of intervention not a framework within which to work' (Gilster, 2012, p.770). During the 1990s, disgruntled women self-produced zines (See Fig. 5.9) to 'get their own back on *Cosmopolitan'* and its '400 pages of absolute BOLLOCKS' by being 'lardy and powerful' to release 'womankind from self-critical bullshit magazines' (Sweet, 1996, p.7). In Holliday's case, gendered cosmetic fixation and an overruling capitalist stronghold remain unchallenged. This trend has led to demands from feminist thinkers that 'the time for fence-sitting is past' and another anti-capitalism feminism must be built (Arruzza, et al., 2019, pp.3-4).

Figure 5.9

Lucy Sweet's 1990s zine, Unskinny refused to buy into Cosmopolitan's conventions by alternatively offering 'lard recipes and amusing cartoons.'

Source: Glasgow Women's Library

Social movement lifespans are comprised from 'temporal' shifting structures where their peak is commonly followed by decline (Gillen, 2020, p.518). Following this cycle, body positivity had integrated with cultural artefacts long responsible for feminine fat-shaming (Baxter & Cosslett, 2014). As exemplified in Figure 5.10, which features a *Cosmopolitan* edition from 2002. This issue predates the body positivity boom. On its front cover, alongside an image of Britney Spears, a subheading boasts: 'Diet Tricks Experts Don't Dare Tell You (but We Will).' With little severance, the Tess Holliday edition assimilated a plumper variant of white femininity into existing beauty standards. Comparatively, Srinivasan (2021, p.1) declares feminism to be 'a political movement to transform the world beyond recognition.'

Figure 5.10

Cosmopolitan magazine has a history of endorsing the patriarchal policing of women's bodies by publishing diet tips for profit.

Source: Cosmopolitan (2002)

Glossy magazines are interested in sales, as opposed to social change generation, and only ceased running fatphobic editorials when it became profitable to do so. Tess Holliday's appearance on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* arguably also represented 'peak' commodification and the BPM's full integration with the mainstream. Those surveyed voiced such concerns:

> *I became involved with fat activism when I was searching for plus size clothes back in 2007. Body posi was started by fat activists before being co-opted…*
>
> *Body posi is a co-opting of fat activism, which is much more radical and political. Body posi is a watering down of fat activism, making it palatable for sale and consumption by the mainstream and by capitalism. body posi doesn't ask people to do anything radical or anything at all...*
>
> *It does nothing to trouble fatphobia because it is not a movement, it's a cash grab.*
>
> (Morgan, 41, white Irish, Demigirl non-binary, America)

This perceived deficit in structural challenge was previously criticised by fat activists who took part in Charlotte Cooper's (2016, p.59) ethnographic study. One of Cooper's (2016, p.59) participants lamented: 'I don't want, you know, fatties to just be on *Vogue* magazine, or whatever, I want it to be much more broad than that… Like not a piece of the pie, the pie is rotten, let's get rid of the pie, or something.'

During my survey, hashtaggers made disclosures of a similar nature. Some were undecided whether the BPM could be considered 'feminist' at all because of its worrisome current direction:

> *Body positivity has been taken over by folks who already have loads of privilege and access. Much of what gets #bodypositive is actually more violence & oppression.*

> (Imogen, 40, white, female, America)

These findings are consistent with those contained in established literature. Chapter Three explored social media research undertaken by Apryl A. Williams (2017). She observed that fat BWOC's variations in lived experiences were submerged within structures upholding thin white privilege. As social media has evolved, my research suggests these exclusionary patterns of erasure appear to have transferred to Instagram. Recent work (Frazier & Mehdi, 2021, p.13) supports this notion that fat is being 'forgotten' in the BPM due to its 'violent co-optation' and 'pandering to capitalism.' This major theme of co-optation continued into my participant observation data.

Anti Diet Riot Fest (2020)

On 19th January 2020, I attended an Anti Diet Riot Fest event. One of the organised talks I witnessed that day was entitled, *Race Matters* (See Fig. 5.11). This was a roundtable discussion conducted in a London bar, which Instagrammer, Stephanie Yeboah (@stephanieyeboah) chaired. On stage, Yeboah reflected how during the early noughties black women started to utilise Tumblr as a safe space to share images and poetry representing their 'beautiful black bodies.'

In her later published title, *Fattily Ever After*, Yeboah (2020a, p.17) elaborated that this body positive 'resurgence' had 'stemmed from predominantly black and Jewish plus-size womxn [sic] in the US,' as part of NAAFA organising. That day however, Yeboah concluded her speech with a declaration that she now openly opts out of the BPM. In her estimation, body positivity had stopped recentring WOC and focused less and less on marginalised bodies to the erasure of non-privileged embodiment.

Figure 5.11

Instagrammer, Stephanie Yeboah pictured speaking at the Anti Diet Riot Fest event held in Colours, Hoxton on Sunday 19th January 2020.

Source: Author's Own Fieldwork Photography (2020)

Algorithmic Bias

Another major finding was the way hashtaggers felt black fat bodies were disproportionately policed by Instagram's policy structures. Algorithmic bias was a key explanation offered by many surveyed for patterns of exclusion existing within the BPM. My survey generated new knowledge, obtained directly from frontline hashtivists, detailing how the platform itself actively upholds fatphobic and racist beauty ideologies:

> *Instagram does all it can to try and hush Fat Activism. Though good for spreading a message, it is incredibly fatfobic.*

> (Hayley, 21, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

Across my dataset, active Instagrammers confirmed they believed white femininities took up the most space in the BPM (See Appendix B). From the big data amassed, identity characteristics were sorted and coded to measure the most prevalent features. This task was completed to discern who was taking up space within the BPM, as part of fourth-wave feminism. The slim, white, heterosexual, Eurocentric and able-bodied woman was perceived to be overrepresented. Instagrammers implicated the platform's socio-technical structures for their role in engineering this resulting narrow participant profile.

A common rallying cry, popularised through BPM memes is, 'Honour my Curves.' It appeared the BPM's chosen protest site was failing to do so by withdrawing visual expressions of black feminine curvature:

> *Instagram systematically censors women of colour and fat people contributing to the stigma.*

> (Laura, 26, white, female, 4WF, Australia)

Instagram was found to provide a pedestal for hegemonic white femininities, as opposed to an intersectional feminist protest site. Beauty ideologies fixated on whiteness were upheld and left WOC struggling to be seen in a protest scenario where visibility is equated with empowerment. Experiential testimonies detailed how social currency seemed to diminish with the darkening of skin tone and the gaining of weight. Theorisations of fourth-wave feminism understand SNSs to have expanded the political activism and agency of BWOC by offering 'pathways to healing,' such as via Tarana Burke's #MeToo movement (Marsiglia, et al., 2021, p.192). My survey data makes an evidence-based contribution to these ongoing feminist debates by also exposing social media's propensity to deny and debilitate black fat female agency.

Survey participants shed new light by exposing contributors to the underrepresentation of fat BWOC. Feedback granted an insider perspective relaying the barriers SNSs could pose to internet-enacted fourth-wave feminism:

I don't think Instagram offers this space itself. They have time after time deleted content from body positive accounts of women who are fully clothed because they were visibly fat. I think that the body positive community happens to be on Instagram but I don't think Instagram is a platform offers this space.

(Marlene, 24, female, 4WF, America)

The site's structures of highly subjective governance were referenced with regularity. Commonplace inferences were made that Instagram stigmatised users on the grounds of fat and racial appearance. Qualitative accounts projected a discriminative domain and offered conditional indicators relating why fat BWOC may achieve less visibility in the BPM.

Fig. 5.12
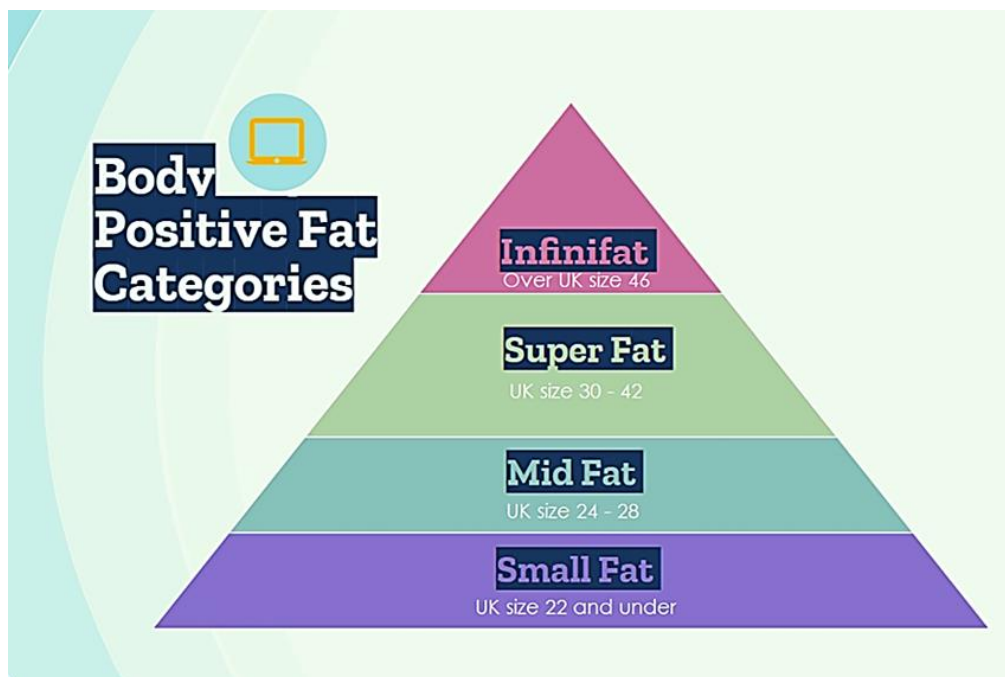
With regards to the issue of fat representation, fat-positive femininities achieve more visibility through user-generated portraiture than mainstream media. An unexpected finding however was the existence of an activist hierarchy of fat classification. Although the BPM stands largely opposed to centralised weight-based judgement mechanisms - such as NHS reliance upon the BMI scale - Instagrammers referred to a set of internally developed benchmarks. Figure 5.12 features an approximate outline of these much-contested criteria, which have been termed 'the fat spectrum' and 'fategories' respectively (Fluffy Kitten Party, 2021, np).

For example, survey respondents employed these descriptors to specify how those occupying the fattest ('superfat' and 'infinifat') and blackest bodies were being invisiblised online:

> *If it's not centering and amplifying superfat, infinifat, and fat bodies that are Black, Indigenous, disabled, trans, and queer it's not radical.*

(Rebecca, 40, white, female, America)

Women who were able to access clothing options from high street retailers were referred to as 'small fats.' The next tier of classification was 'mid fats' who are slightly bigger women that may encounter sizeism because of a lack of size availability in stores. This is followed by latter tiers, such as 'superfats' and 'infinifats,' to describe women whose only clothing choices may be custom-made due to their needs being systematically uncatered for. Fashion studies argue 'infinifat and superfat people are limited in the subjectivities they can perform and are excluded from specific social spaces' because they cannot access 'readily-available' and 'situationally-appropriate' clothing' (Evans, 2020, p.3). It is said that this tiered system exists to appreciate 'the privileges we experience by virtue of our relative proximity to thinness' (Gordon, 2020, p.9).

In Chapter Three, feminist scholars such as Naomi Wolf (1990, p.187), indicated feminist activism and agency against the 'great weight shift' could only exist when women attempt to break away, revolt and develop emancipatory alternatives to patriarchal ideals. Qualitative data analysis showed that those who most closely complied with the 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1983), i.e., the small fats and mid fats, were garnering coverage in the BPM (See Fig. 5.12). On occasion, survey respondents articulated resentment towards 'small fats' for diluting the BPM's politically-minded collective purpose and misrepresenting a serious social justice cause:

> *I think it's important to remember the radical roots of "body positivity." While self-love and body-image certainly tie into both "body pos" and "fat acceptance," there are life-threatening consequences to weight bias. The fattest among us still haven't reaped any benefits from "bo-po" hash-tags. There still aren't "trendy clothes" for them. They still*

> *cannot go to a vast majority of doctors and receive proper treatment*
> *outside of a flippant "just lose weight" suggestion. They still get paid*
> *less, statistically, if they even get hired at all. Hiring managers are*
> *proven to be less likely to hire fat people based on their body size and*
> *its presumed correlation to "laziness" or "poor work ethic." A "small*
> *fat" or "straight-size" person who shared a photo of their one tummy*
> *roll on Instagram might inspire a few other people to love their own*
> *little tummy roll (and that's great) but it does nothing to combat these*
> *issues.*

(Isla, 29, mixed-race, female, 4WF, Europe)

Apprehension was directed towards 'small fats' for stealing the BPM's spotlight away from its meaningful fat acceptance activist objectives. The prevalence of algorithmic bias brought to attention the fact that Instagram's community guidelines were complicit in privileging audience exposure to thin white bodies on their platform. I learned from descriptive disclosures that the lack of body diversity in the BPM did not necessarily signify a failing of feminism. Instead, open-ended survey responses more broadly condemned fourth-wave feminism's choice of virtual platforms, which were seen as actively interfering with its ability to transmit intersectional and inclusive output.

Survey extracts contained anger at the BPM's deradicalised orientation, which meant that the most subjugated were obscured from protest proceedings. With most discontent channelled towards the Instagram application itself for its institutional complicity in reproducing exclusion:

> *Facebook (Instagram's owner) certainly works hard to erase and vilify*
> *fat bodies, so they'll let thin folks post pictures in undies but they'll not*
> *hesitate to ban a photo of a fat person in undies for "violating*
> *community guidelines"…*
>
> *Instagram is never going to be a tool for liberation as long as the*
> *algorithms and the people behind the scenes are white cis rich men*
> *deciding whose bodies are worthy of being seen, promoted and*
> *boosted and whose are not. We can find comfort and celebrate each*
> *other, but it's not helping to reduce stigma. The people who are*
> *creating content are what is reducing stigma.*

(Rebecca, 40, white, female, America)

The platform was perceived to deploy double standards by privileging thin bodies through allowing them to gain undisturbed exposure. In comparison,

a discriminative disparity existed relating to the display of fat female flesh. Instagram functioned as a gatekeeper by being over surveillant towards certain user populations and curtailing their exhibitionist conduct:

> *Instagram is more likely to remove a provocative photo of a fat woman than one of a skinny woman for "violating their guidelines" even if they are wearing the same thing in each woman's respective clothing size.*

(Billie, 22, white, female, 4WF, America)

Qualitative passages documented the regularity with which posts containing feminine fatness were policed and removed from online exhibition by the platform hosts. Survey feedback raised questions about the viability of a social movement being channelled through social media profiles; Instagram was not only found to be a fourth-wave feminist protest site, but a site of sanction and censorship. Considering such systemic authority, the issue of whether online connective action is supplemented by offline collective action becomes more pressing. This topic is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

My data highlights the extent to which SNSs are subjective spaces, governed by rules and regulations. Instagram did not present a neutral platform for protest. Chamberlain (2017, p.172) observes that fourth-wave feminism is progressively attempting to integrate LGBT+ identities. Whereas my dataset illustrates that this is a political advancement Instagram appears to stifle, rather than enable and support. All those from my survey sample possessed active Instagram accounts and could experientially recollect the pitfalls of trying to protest online:

> *instagrams censorship often removes lgbtq bodyfat hairy brown/black people over bodies that fit what's marketed as beauty… I personally see more white ciswomen represented in the body positive movement than see I other people, it is not a perfect movement.*

(Monica, 20, mixed-race, female, 4WF, Europe)

Testimonials suggested a correlation exists regarding visibility being favourably bestowed upon heteronormative users with lighter skin and smaller bodies.

In Chapter Three, the concept of racial algorithmic discrimination was

introduced. SNSs were proposed to present powerful intermediary structures between patrons and protest expression (Noble, 2018), whereby studies suggested non-norm-conforming body types were being actively removed from circulation (Salty Report, 2019; 2020). Existing literature is now supplemented by fresh perspectives, through my user testimonies, to show that despite calls for 'design justice' (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p.54) political activism and agency are still being tapered by coded structures. BPM hashtaggers were distressed by the interference and censorship enforced by Instagram through its community guidelines. Findings revealed that algorithmic infrastructures were privileging the presentation of certain body types over others. The result of such sanctioning is that a certain typology of protest population is produced. Duguay (2016, p.3) terms these processes 'platform politics,' as protocols subjectively sort who are 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' A strength of my research is that it draws attention not only to the bodies that are gaining subversive visibility within the BPM on Instagram, but that it brings to light the bodies that have been removed. Survey data challenges the suitability of Instagram as a channel to transmit a revised body realism.

I argue that social media application structures are silencing significant amounts of hashtag feminism. In fact, survey respondents disclosed incidents where Instagram customs appeared distinctly antifeminist:

> *instagram sensors posts… I've had feminist posts taken down (e.g., showing a little menstrual blood but no nudity,) and be shadow banned… which makes me more careful and self censored in what i now post… meanwhile there are close to pornographic influencer accounts not being censored. instagram is very 'male gaze.' i think it's ridiculous that female nipples are censored while butts in thongs are OK.*

(Meg, 35, white, female, 4WF, America)

While trying to maximise Instagram as an intersectional protest site, hashtagger campaign content continues to be controlled under Instagram's suppressive structures. These real-life anecdotes brought into question whether Instagram was a friend or foe of fourth-wave feminism. The widespread occurrence of algorithmic bias was a crucial finding. The BPM

has been severely criticised for whitewashing and exclusionary practice. Nonetheless, the interjection of external social media enterprises outlawing the protest presence of people from marginalised populations helped explain their absence from a feminist fourth wave reliant on SNSs for mobilisation.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented key findings from my social media research through a critical feminist lens. It is unreliable to assume that all mass female behaviours are acts of 'fourth-wave feminism' simply because they unfold in the digital domain and feature a trending hashtag. I initiated a direct dialogue with those belonging to the #BodyPositive Instagram network to assess if they considered themselves a member of the feminist movement. The majority of hashtaggers were agreeable to this ascription and did align their virtual behaviours with 'fourth-wave feminism.' Aside from networked delivery, fourth-wave feminism is commonly defined by its alleged receptivity towards multicultural nuances and accommodation of intersectional plural feminist perspectives. In compiling a participant profile, new knowledge was developed regarding dominant socio-demographics. My research established that this expression of fourth-wave feminism was overwhelmingly enacted by young white women.

In the past, established studies particularly noted the existence of hegemonic whiteness within body positivity, yet I wanted to expand this analytic discussion beyond superficial statistical appraisal. Over the course of this chapter, key themes have been extrapolated from big data to scrutinise and qualitatively engage with the underrepresentation of BWOC. Several possible contributing factors were considered with substantial support from survey testimonies. These consisted of the alienation imposed by a homogenising white feminism, which recent publications philosophise as responsible for 'killing' feminism (Zakaria, 2021), and fourth-wave focus on flesh exposure as a primary means of attaining empowerment. This was pertinent because historically, first, second and third feminist waves have stood accused of attempting to assert a universalist outlook. My data

showed that these criticisms were being mimicked in connection with fourth-wave mobilisations deemed indifferent to nuances in multicultural identity.

At all times, efforts were made to preserve protestor voice during presentation, as it was vital to loyally recount how digital exclusion had manifest in Instagrammers' lives. As a feminist researcher, it was important to not speak for my research participants and be receptive to intersectional deviations in experience. In accordance with this aim, later sections devoted space to Instagrammers' overwhelming claims of movement co-optation, wherein survey data was further supported by my offline fieldwork. This research makes an original contribution to knowledge by committing women's feelings of collective frustration to academic record relating how an activist outfit, set up to serve the interests of fat BWOC, has been appropriated.

The chapter highlighted major findings surrounding the barrier algorithmic bias posed to the expression of activism and agency. Notions of feminist agency often prioritise possession of control over the trajectory of one's own life course. The prevalence of Instagram interference was significant because it exposed that its female usership only possess the illusion of editorial control online. These findings indicate that fourth-wave feminism's capacity to advocate for body diversity was severely diminished by intermediary platform structures, after numerous participants recalled instances of Instagram removing their content. The next chapter shifts focus from consideration of who is participating in fourth-wave feminism and progresses to examine the selfie-empowerment strategies mobilised by hashtag feminists in greater depth.

Chapter 6: Making Invisible Bodies Visible

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on who was gaining visibility within fourth-wave feminism, with a view to meet my research objectives. A participant profile was subsequently compiled to chart the distribution of political activism and agency within the BPM. Age and racial identifiers were pinpointed as key intersections compromising participation in photographic processes on Instagram. This chapter expands these critical conversations to address another overarching objective. There is a need to understand if hashtaggers wilfully produce digital images as acts of 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004), in response to feminist concerns regarding aesthetical fixation and objectification. For example, Gill & Elias (2014, p.179) dismissed the emergence of LYB discourses urging women to 'awaken their incredible' by labelling them 'articulations of sexism.'

It is imperative to initiate direct dialogue with Instagrammers and assess the presence of political purpose behind their photography. The admonishment of visual feminist expression, as playing up to the patriarchy, warrants further scrutiny in tandem with a live case study. I argue the time has come to stop disregarding embodied resistance when photographs are acting as indispensable message carriers in fourth-wave feminist practice. To persistently settle the female body, within phallocentric narratives of moral panic surrounding its sexploitation, is to 'rob' it of its agency (Ringrose, 2011, p.99). This chapter considers the possibility that self-imaging provides opportunities to perform improved relational 'gendered becomings' with the body, exceeding this presumed 'pin-up' status (Ringrose & Renold, 2016, pp.223-228).

Across the following sections, dominant themes from my final dataset will be examined, with the overall aim to further understanding about how the body and Instagram are utilised as protest sites. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse these networked processes of emerging political engagement. My

findings will corroborate Castells' (2013, p.xi) conception of new networked social movements, where he acknowledges that 'the power of images is paramount' as a contemporary mobilisation tool.

Invisibility and Visibility

Chapter Five presented findings suggesting the mediatory role white feminism and algorithmic structures can play in selectively conferring visibility and invisibility upon certain bodies. Within patriarchal society, hegemonic beauty standards signify another cultural force complicit in this process. Throughout Chapter Three, the contents of my literature review provided an assessment of how weight-watching becomes a widespread routinised habit when slenderness is upheld as the pinnacle of feminine achievement by pervasive man-made body ideologies. Female figures that most rigidly adhere to strict disciplinary regimes - such as dieting and detoxing - are aggrandised within value systems that equate social worth with taking up as little space as possible. Recently, singer-songwriter, Adele's 7 stone weight loss made frontpage headlines in national newspapers (See Fig. 6.1). In stark contrast, fat female embodiment is frequently stigmatised as a social ill, whereby it is either erased altogether, or sold as a visual stimulus to encourage womankind to starve themselves towards self-rectification.

Within first-wave feminism, suffragette activist, Teresa Billington-Greig (1911, p.137) called for broadened gender equality advocacy, surpassing formal claims for the right to vote:

> I seek her complete emancipation from all shackles of law and custom, from all chains of sentiment and superstition, from all outer imposed disabilities and cherished inner bondages which unite to shut off liberty from the human soul borne in her body.

A feminist theoretical framework acknowledges that empowerment can derive from when gender oppression is redressed within cultural customs and not narrowly confined to policy-based rallying. This protest standpoint from the past informs analysis of current fourth-wave iterations, as fat feminists resist against the gendered 'inner bondages' imposed via 'chains of sentiment' on to their embodied realities (Billington-Greig, 1911, p.137).

Figure 6.1

Britain's most read national newspaper, The Sun glorifies 'amazing' weight loss, as evidenced through how frontpage visibility is recurrently granted to women's body modification. One woman's diminishing waistline is considered newsworthy.

Source: The Sun (2020; 2021)

My survey granted hashtaggers the space to detail their struggles and report empowering qualities associated with digital participation in their own words:

> *Diet culture makes its money from encouraging low self esteem through promoting unattainable bodies…*
>
> *the feeling good about our bodies is needed because we've been conditioned to hate them for so long…*
>
> *It's showing women that bodies come in all shapes and sizes and that we shouldn't feel obliged to force our bodies to look a certain way.*
>
> (Rhiannon, 25, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

The application of a feminist lens meant that social justice calls vested in matters outside of statute, such as stereotyping and weight stigma, could be legitimised as activist causes.

BPM attempts to transmit exhibitionist expressions of fat positivity have

nevertheless been critiqued as contributors, rather than challengers, to female oppression. In Chapter One, existing literature (Kite, 2017; 2018) suggested that the prevalence of bikini selfies may function to support sexist treatment in subservience to the male gaze. This was developed by Mulvey (1989) to depict how women are primarily visually presented to cater for a heterosexual male perspective. Chapter Three also explored how patriarchal belief systems are mobilised through reductive imagery confining women to object status by overemphasising their 'looked-about-ness' (Mulvey, 1989, p.62).

Statistically significant proportions of Instagram users were found to be participating in selfie production. The findings documented make evidence-based contributions to a vibrant area of debate within feminist scholarship. A (post)feminist protest shift towards the female body's self-objectification is being positioned as an obstacle to political activism and agency (Gill, 2007). Body positivity offers an example of what Gill (2016, p.610) claims are 'new feminist visibilities.' When questioned, a considerable majority (66.7%, n=329) of BPM Instagrammers had posted generic body selfies on the platform (See Fig. 6.2). With regards to specific types of self-portraiture, 44% (n=219) had taken bikini selfies, followed by 40.8% (n=201) while working out and 23.9% (n=118) had simulated Before-and-After features.

Postfeminist theorists, such as Gill (2016, p.610) disparagingly align the advent of these mainstream feminisms with intensified misogyny. In turn, the Instagram application has been situated as part of the problem, rather than the solution. Some of these concerns permeated survey responses, provided by BPM members, questioning the perceived integrity and political inclinations of body exhibitionism online:

> *I think that majority influencers depend heavily on the nudity to grown their accounts ending in mainly men filling their accounts. Losing the main reason behind being an influencer… These so called movements are very short lived until the next trending hashtag comes along.*

> (Poornima, 42, Indian, female, Africa)

Selfies were not unequivocally experienced as empowering image-based interventions. Furthermore, sociological scholarship has critiqued the Insta-ready body as a manipulated digital object that fosters 'fake intimacy' through a contritely posed 'happy and carefree attitude' (Elias, et al., 2017, p.3).

Fig. 6.2

Selfie-Empowerment

118
Before-and-After

329
Generic Body Selfie

201
Work Out

219
Bikini Selfie
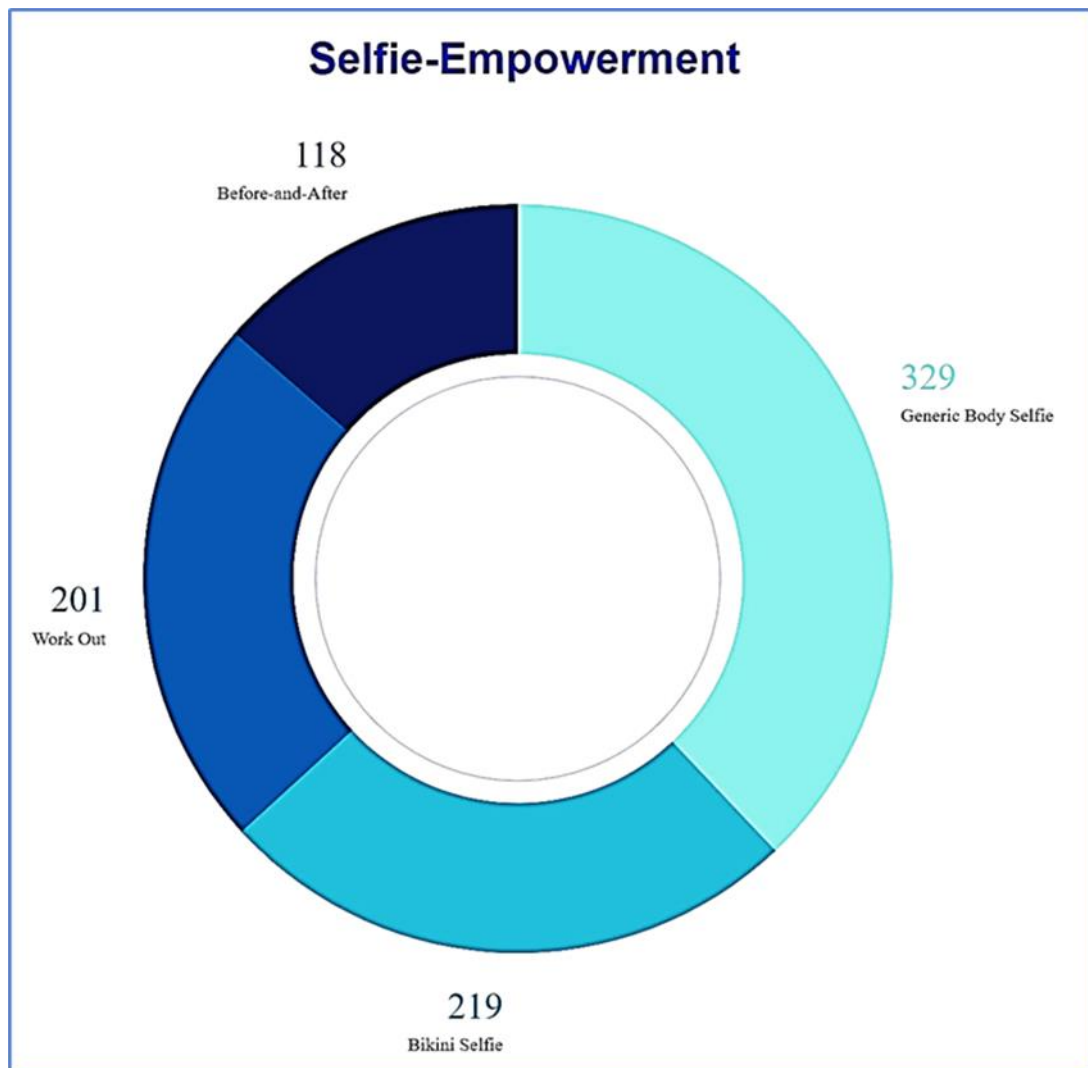
My main research aim was to investigate how Instagram profiles and the female body are collaboratively mobilised as sites of protest. However, the genuineness of BPM performative protest output was additionally cast into doubt on occasion by active hashtaggers:

> *The people that get all the hype and attention are women who have huge booties and flaunt it…*

> *I see a lot of women with desirable bodies posting for attention or money. Its rare I come across one who I feel is sincere.*

(Ceri, 24, female, America)

Postfeminist literature has condoned the Instagram platform as a purveyor of neoliberal 'aesthetic labour' which allows filtered artifice and apolitical self-promotion to prosper (Elias, et al., 2017, p.3). Rosalind Gill (2018, p.255) has gone as far as to say that this trend towards empowerment being expressed through LYB discourses has made body confidence, the 'new sexy.' Such literature positions the visual strategies, widely deployed by internet feminisms to overcome invisibility experienced by non-norm-conforming body types, as vacuous and contravening to the equality cause.

Fourth-wave feminism's tendency towards flaunting the female form onscreen through displays of self-love is described as 'an articulation of sexism' (Gill & Elias, 2014, p.181). This is because 'being beautiful just the way you are' and 'sexy at any size' body positive imagery are seen as bolstering lookism and reductive objectification (Gill & Elias, 2014, p.181). These worries regarding assimilation into pornographic practices were openly voiced by those surveyed:

> *I don't like that girls are still trying to be sexy. Still trying to be pretty, and still vying for acceptance. It's a step in the right direction, I suppose, but not far enough. The movement is trying to expand the mold rather than break out of it.*

(Courtney, 38, white, female, America)

These stances support existing study into the BPM (Darwin, 2017, p.9), which discerned there was a fine line between sexualisation and self-displaying behaviours, when the exposed body was operationalised in protest. These claims, issued from within and outside academia, call into question Instagram's eligibility as a fourth-wave feminist protest site maximised by the BPM to transmit a re-evaluated body realism.

Although Instagram was revealed to be an imperfect platform, my project sheds new light on the photographic processes adopted by hashtag feminists

online today. Through portraiture, Instagrammers were broadly found to critically reposition fat femininity, outside of both, pornographic and obesity crisis narrative arcs. Survey testimonies contained strong first-hand counterarguments to established postfeminist scholarship. Photography was seen as playing a fundamental role in visual strategies of selfie-empowerment, meaning these digital artefacts should not be hastily disregarded altogether as saccharine snapshots with nothing to say.

In many cases, these snapshots publicly transmit identities dislocated from dominant discourses purveying an essentialist womanhood. From early 20th century crusades against 'modesty' dress norms of Catholic propriety (Ní Bhroiméil, 2008), to the Bloomers' battle to wear trousers (Jungnickel, 2015; 2018), women have long disputed and remade embodied versions of femininity (Bendall, 2021). My data reflects how in the 21st century, they continue to do so.

Most Instagrammers surveyed alerted attention to the existence of political substance driving visual performances. Phillipa works in an eating disorder research laboratory and spends 7-9 hours per week on Instagram. This digital labour is dedicated to dispelling the myth that thinness signifies an automatic indicator of good health, while fatness is denounced for symptomising bad health. Phillipa underlined the important role user-generated images play in granting stigmatised body types affirmative visibility:

> *Mainstream media tends to hide women's bodies that do not fit the thin ideal or if they are shown it is for a joke. Self-initiated nudity for those who don't fit the mold is a form of protest regardless of inital intent.*

> (Phillipa, 25, white, female, 4WF, America)

This agentic drive towards mobilising selfies to disrupt fat female derision was a strong thematic thread. Rather than adding opportunities to ogle, as part of heteromale 'scopophilia' (Mulvey, 1989, p.59), selfies signified visual withdrawal from the 'body work' associated with 'doing' feminine gendered expectations (Ringrose & Coffey, 2017, p.179). Masculine scopophilia is a term used to describe the voyeuristic pleasure sought from looking at still or

moving images featuring women as sexual spectacles. It was only by initiating subject-centred introspective discussion with Instagrammers that this new knowledge could be garnered. My approach granted an insider perspective through facilitating access to detailed feminist thought processes. The collection of survey statements delved below the superficial, deceivingly patriarchal, surface of the posing and preening to tease out the activism within digital actions.

Fig. 6.3

A large percentage of body positive posts consist of selfies, which contain high levels of nudity. Do you think that social change can be achieved via this type of self-initiated nudity?

Yes   385 (78.4%)

No   106 (21.6%)
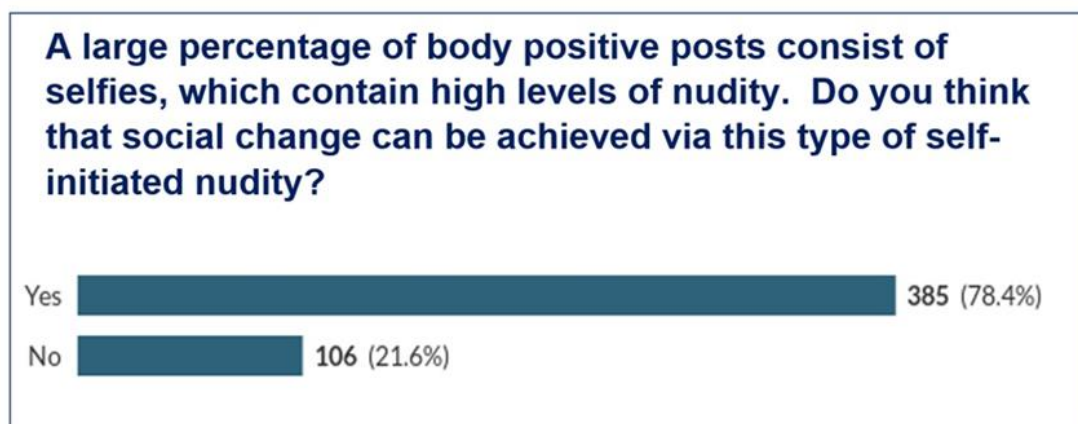
Despite considerable postfeminist critique, the majority of BPM Instagrammers confirmed that they associated exhibition of their underrepresented body types to signify an attempt at inciting meaningful social change. Research data showed that a strong majority (78.4%, n=385) of hashtaggers believed that public shows of nude photographic self-display could achieve social change (See Fig. 6.3). Selfie-takers were not baring flesh to satisfy heteromale sexual appetites; this was simply how empowerment and revolution were being expressed in the digital age. Instagram was deemed a 'place of empowerment' because picture-making was said to be defying oppressive norms, rather than seeking to prolong them:

> *Body positivity does not need to ne nude or bikini only, everyone can decide on their own terms. But it is revolutional that we can finally see people naked and in lingerine and on beach even thou they don't fit the narrow beauty ideals of todays society.*

For me this is not about objectification since i choose everything: the pics, the outfits, the picture angles. I have the control and i am taking my body back.

(Agnes, 30, white, female, 4WF, Sweden)

When the behaviours detailed in descriptive survey statements are analysed as 'image events' (DeLuca,1999; 2008), in tandem with theory that progressively recognises the key role images play in contemporary political engagement, the revolution cited above can be read from selfies.

Delicath & DeLuca (2003, p.315) define image events as staged forms of visual performance circulated as 'fragments of argument' for the purpose of social change claims-making. Survey participants recounted the way their bodies were weaponised to make fat feminist statements:

I am a fat person and normalizing bodies that look like mine is a priority…

Growing up I never saw my body type represented in the media unless it was a "what not to look like" expose. Even now I feel better scrolling through social media and seeing people that actually look like me. That feels like a community…

I think the body positive movement rejects whatever ideals that the media has concocted over time. There's no "right" way to look or be.

(Olivia, 27, white, female, 4WF, America)

Therefore, when a fat woman breaks away from gendered conventions of censorship, concealment and containment to positively bare flesh in public, visible belly fat and bulges become valid 'fragments' within a feminist counterargument.

For example, Figure 6.4 features a selfie anchoring the nude body as a protest tool for fat-positive representation. The 'argumentative possibilities' of image events are shown here, in this statement against sizeism, illuminating how photographs can be mobilised as 'staged protests designed for media dissemination' (Delicath & DeLuca, 2003, p.315). BPM self-portraiture outwardly questions existing embodied femininities. As observable in this instance, where the by-line reads: 'What if we stopped pursuing thinness and aimed for happiness instead?' The 'blemishes' and

physical 'flaws' of fat female embodiment, traditionally erased through manipulation technologies such as airbrushing, are purposefully situated front of camera.

Figure 6.4

A BPM Instagram post continues critical feminist dialogue by dismantling dominant diet culture discourse with fourth-wave tools, such as selfies and memes.

Source: Bekah Ellis (2020)

Printed with written permission.

Survey respondents testified there was communicative power from positively reclaiming visible markers of fatness from depletive dominant discourse:

> *History and patriarchy has made women's bodies purely sexualized, something to be covered, something evil - the property of men. Being positive about your body means tsking back your ownership of that body and having agency over it. If you choose to show your body naked and highlight you curves or cellulite or percieved imperfections-you are letting others see that they are not alone in with their body type and they dont have to be afraid of, ashamed of, or saddened by the body that they have.*

(Kelly, 38, black, female, 4WF, America)

BPM user-generated images openly offer alternative fat-positive female realities and act as a vehicle for new political possibilities. Such self-portraiture interrupts what Wolf (1990, p.187) previously described in Chapter Three as 'the great weight shift,' designed to distract and deplete the political and physical appetites of women. DIY imagery was found to depict

wilful withdrawal from the entrenched 'political castration' of women through 'fat regulation' (Wolf, 1990, p.199) and ultimately, signify a counterresponse of noncompliance to obedient objectification.

The BPM is a visual movement being fittingly mobilised on a visual platform. Survey participants continually reinforced that to be fat and proud demanded extroverted and embodied protest logics:

> *The movement has to be about bodies first and foremost because it is about getting fat represented. And that is nothing else apart from a body 'issue.' I don't understand how you could do it without showing women's bodies.*

> (Bethany, 36, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

Instagrammers were perplexed by associations with objectification because unwelcome claims of sexualisation only served to detract from feminist aspirations. BPM behaviours adhere to Sternadori's (2019, p.33) description of a fourth-wave organisation founded on 'flaunting violations of social norms' through an overt 'unladylikeness' on 'a new stage in the fight for gender inequality.' Feminist texts state that the performance of 'unladylike' behaviours can offer a crucial means of 'smashing the patriarchy' and 'claiming your space' (Conger & Ervin, 2018).

This thesis responds to a tension between derogative postfeminist critiques and feedback from fieldwork into hashtag feminism. For instance, Kelly & Daneshjoo (2019) found that young female activists (18-24 years) considered Instagram body positivity a source of self-empowerment because users could positively reframe body perceptions. These existing findings are built upon and substantiated through the expressive testimonies of my own research participants.

Social media self-representation was continually reiterated as an empowerment source through which fat feminism could achieve visibility:

> *Fat selfies saved my life because for me it was easier to see beauty in others than in myself, so I think selfies are important…*

> *A naked body is not inherently sexual. Being naked can be liberating, can be poetic, can be revolutionary. Seing bodies like mine is important*

> (Carmella, white, female, 4WF, America)

Cameras are being leveraged to advocate for fat liberation. By interrogating Instagram content creators, testimonial data suggested that a body orientation was non-negotiable in BPM empowerment strategies. Dominant diet culture discourses had tarnished women's relationships with their bodies, meaning that consequently, it was only through the body that a feminist counternarrative could be performed.

Bikini Selfies

In *Body Politics*, Nancy Henley (1977, p.36) provided feminist analysis into the sentimental signposting that occurs within sexist societies, where women are conditioned to become, 'the incredible shrinking woman.' To take up space is recognised as a feminist act for women within patriarchal structures that frame femininity as little, lithe and as physically unimposing as possible (Henley, 1977, p.38). While, in comparison, masculinity is hegemonically defined by a man's ability to occupy space (Henley, 1977, p.38). My data found that pictures are being used by Instagrammers to resist these prescriptive gendered patterns of social behaviour. For instance, 44.4% (n=219) of hashtaggers indicated they had specifically staged a 'bikini' selfie (See Fig. 6.2). This practice is observable in Figure 6.5, where Samara Terese harnesses a bikini selfie to revolt against gendered beauty standards.

When scrutinised in accordance with a feminist framework, analysis can exceed a superficial surface assessment, to fully contemplate the political statement being made. Survey responses confirmed that feminist rationales were present in the mindsets of practising selfie-takers. Data supported that Instagram is being used to reject the notion that women's bodies are meant for male consumption:

> *as we learn more about the impact of misogyny/toxic masculinity on our opinions of our bodies, taking nude selfies can be a way to take your body back from the male gaze*

(Andie, 30, African, non-binary, America)

Selfies were conceptualised by their takers as visual affronts. Qualitative feedback suggested that body exhibitionism was being used for the targeted disruption of established ideologies with protest objectives of reclamation.
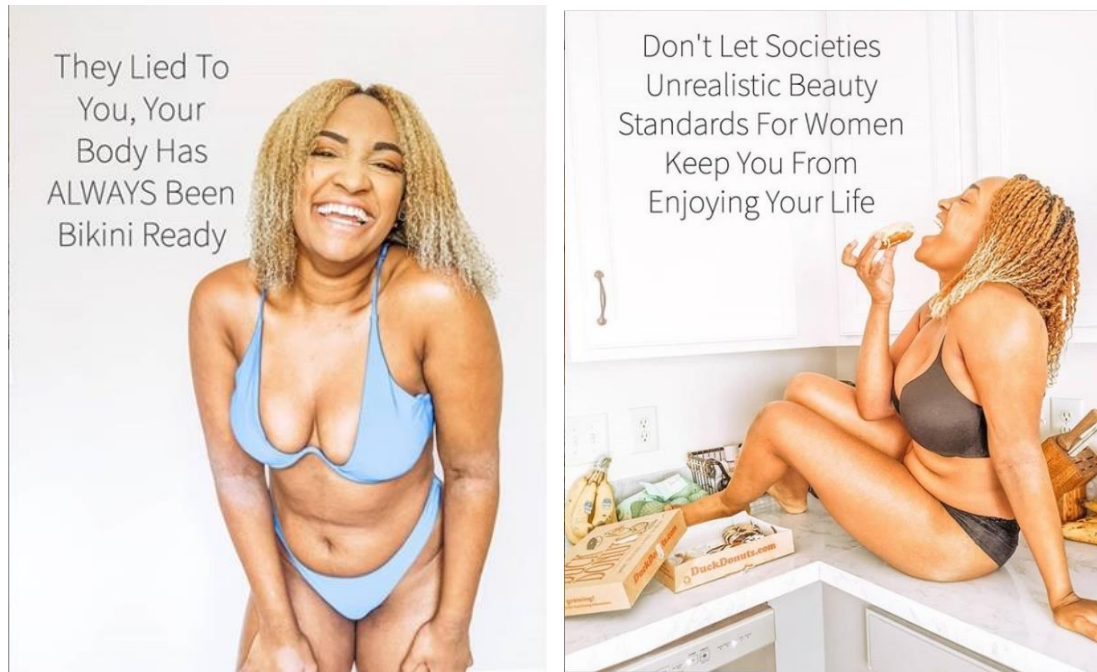
Figure 6.5

Photographic subjects adopt the bikini as a major part of BPM performative politics against 'lies' and 'unrealistic beauty standards' perpetuated by corporations and public institutions.

Source: Samara Terese (2020)
        Printed with written permission.

Within patriarchal hierarchies of social organisation, Pedersen (2020c, p.378) observes that 'on the beach, there are unwritten rules for how the gendered body should carry itself and behave.' The sense of ownership wielded over female embodiment can be observed throughout history. Pictured left, in Figure 6.6, is an image of a woman's beach attire from 1895. During this period, Washington lawmakers proposed bills making it 'unlawful' for women to wear 'tight fitting jerseys' and 'stockings which visibly fasten above the knees' (*South Wales Echo*, 1896, p.3). Conventions prioritised concealment, as the bare female body had to refrain from public ceremony, on the grounds

that exposure may 'cause an appeal to men's passions' (*South Wales Echo*, 1896, p.3). Systemic body censorship was exercised in the (male) interest of upholding 'decency.'

BPM members were enlightened regarding this history of gendered body censorship and described how Instagram photographic processes were political based on their capability to uplift marginalised bodies by rejecting:

> *That women have been long expected to hide their bodies and shame…*
>
> *To wear long sleeves and long dresses down to their ankles, and never appear sexual or flirty but that should be a dirty little secret for some guy that won't even date them in public. Fat selfies are an act of rebellion.*

> (Sharon, 37, mixed-race, female, America)

My dataset evidenced that hashtaggers were engaging in semiotic redirection. These findings were in keeping with earlier feminist framings of digital activism and agency. Sara Ahmed (2010, p.52) recognised how early blogging platforms were embraced by women to pushback against imposed social orthodoxies, in order that 'minority subjects can reclaim something that has been taken from her.' Once fat female nudity was contextualised, within the political prescriptions supplied by survey respondents, BPM Instagram advocacy complied with this notion.

Surveillant cultural tendencies continue to police exhibition of feminine flesh. In 2015, the fat female form was semiotically curtailed through Protein World's controversial, Are You Beach Body Ready? campaign. Pictured right in Figure 6.6, the poster promoting a weight loss aid triggered mass demonstration and was later banned from London Transport after commuters complained it was objectifying and offensive. Market messaging had been clear, only slimline femininities duly compliant in body maintenance regimens, were 'ready' for public display.

Figure 6.6

Pictured left: A late 19th century illustration showing socially acceptable Victorian women's beach attire, whereby bodies were concealed in the interests of suppressing potential male sexual arousal.

Pictured right: An early 21st century advertisement from the weight loss industry endorsing the suppression of feminine fatness through slimming products and slender stereotypes.

Source: The Welshman (1895, p.7) and Protein World (2015)

Contrary to patriarchal attempts to carry out 'communicative injustice' (Boyce Kay, 2020, p.172) by delegitimising female-favoured protest outlets, my survey data showed that selfies provided women with empowerment opportunities to challenge narrow beauty ideals. Traditionally, a woman's swimwear has been subjected to external regulation through male-coded ideologies, objectifying bodies as 'too sexy' or 'too fat.' Research responses highlighted however that BPM Instagrammers were not taking bikini selfies to add to this canon of chauvinistic commentary. Instead, photographic acts of exhibitionism were designated to be calls for fat social justice and respect:

> *I was always torn down about my size growing up as a competitive dancer. I decided to start loving my body throughout the process instead of trying to "fit" in…*

> *As a larger bodied female I'm not trying to be the same as women.*
> *Just acknowledged and not talked down to would be nice.*

(Nikki, 26, white, female, America)

Through swimsuit self-portraiture, the fat female form was defying 'inner bondages' (Billington-Greig, 1911, p.137) exercised over a woman's possibilities for self-formation. Those surveyed told me that image events were empowering because they constructed a critical space to subvert inflicted measurements of gendered acceptability.

My research found that BPM digital behaviours worked in the interests of enhancing fat female social integration. Selfie production was seen as activism because, within the BPM, it worked as a vehicle to regenerate body belief systems:

> *I think when someone has been oppressed for so long when they take*
> *a nude selfie or even a bikini selfie it's deemed radical because they*
> *are literally going against everything they have been taught.*

(Zoe, 26, mixed-race, female, 4WF, America)

My data revealed that it was inaccurate to align acts of selfie-empowerment with self-monitoring and objectification to meet male measures of social worth. Piepmeier (2009) reminds that 'making media' is 'doing feminism.' Photography provides a way for women to achieve fat-positive female representation and overcome internalised misogyny.

This conclusion was reinforced by participant observation data. In September 2019, I attended Bodyposipanda's Never Say Diet Club Live event at The TramShed, Cardiff. Following the evening's main performance segment, audience members were instructed to open an envelope located on their seats. It contained a leaflet, entitled, *What Now?* (See Appendix C). This literature was produced by the show's organiser, BPM Instagrammer, Megan Jayne Crabbe (@meganjaynecrabbe) to suggest ways patrons could continue to spread the body positive message. The fourth pointer enlisted reads: 'wear the bikini.' This observation exemplified the central status bikini selfies occupy as a self-empowerment strategy within the BPM.

Body Normativity and Agency

Self-display could be appreciated as part of a critical photographic process of granting maligned body types visibility to redress subjugated framings within patriarchal societies:

> *Fat bodies are objectified non-consensually thru all the regular practices of diet culture, especially headless fatty photos[11]. Feminists who object to flipping that on its head and making our own images in a world that denies us access to see ourselves don't understand what they're talking about and do not understand a fat point of view. Which is not surprising, since feminism has historically refused to listen to fat voices.*

> (Morgan, 41, white Irish, Demigirl non-binary, America)

My feminist research is listening to fat voices. The bodies being described by selfie-takers were not the docile passengers of postfeminist theory. Postfeminist literature's derecognition of fourth-wave tendencies towards flaunting the female form fail to appreciate that feminist conceptualisations of political activism and agency often prioritise a woman's status as a 'choice maker' (Harris & Shields Dobson, 2015, p.148). Fittingly, Instagrammers argued their content creation was at least consensual.

Selfies were found to grant women newfound freedom to portray an untarnished version of fat embodiment and repackage it as a less alienating experience. In 1995, Mary J. Russo coined the term, 'the female grotesque' to describe how the 'Fat Lady' is conventionally presented as an unknown freakish curiosity. Russo (1995, p.14) aligned 'unruly' fat ladies with other fringe female identities, such as the Bearded Woman and the Tattooed Woman. In the past, 'displays of extreme weight' became a commonplace attraction of Victorian British seaside culture, featuring acts such as 'Miss Rosie: The 36 Stone Fat Lady' to provide 'summertime entertainment' (Purce, 2017, p.2). Archive photography exists of these prominent fat female figures, yet they did not exert the same authority over their public portrayal

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[11] Fat activist, Charlotte Cooper (2007) coined the term 'headless fatties' to describe dehumanising news coverage of fat bodies, where subjects are beheaded with focus restricted to 'the body, the belly, the arse, food.'

as experienced on SNSs today (See Fig. 6.7). The engrained ostracisation of fat feminine identity is further evidenced through the routine manner 'the fat woman' was enlisted alongside other 'freaks and monstrosities,' such as the 'dog-faced boy' and 'the two-faced twin' in circus promotions (*The Evening Express*, 1908, p.2).

Figure 6.7

Miss Rosie (weight 36 stone) holding a bouquet of flowers

Archival ephemera showcasing how fat women have been historically photographed as freak show and circus attractions.

Source: Wellcome Collection (c.1900s)

Photo No: L0034276

Library Ref: EPH WD. Freaks: 1:1

MISS ROSIE (Weight 36 stone).

Through surveying, active BPM members depicted their behaviours as part of targeted photographic processes of political engagement aimed to normalise fatness and not to please men:

> *I think that changing perceptions of beauty by celebrating diverse body types is absolutely essential. You don't NEED to be nude to make a difference. But I think that showing the ways that body exist in the real world (cellulite, saggy breasts, body hair, big bellies, big thighs) gives people a more realistic image of what bodies look like, beyond the curated images we are presented by media moguls.*

(Suzie, 27, female, America)

Women were found to experience empowerment through finally influencing how their fatness was framed by transmitting more realistic interpretations. In comparison, for centuries, images of women's bodies have been exploited by external agencies to generate profit. An outcome that has been achieved through labelling them as carnival sideshow spectacles, or demonising fat features to breed body insecurity and sell corrective diet products.

Notably, Lugones & Spelman (1983, p.573) define feminism as: 'a response to the fact that women have either been left out of, or included in demeaning and disfiguring ways in what has been an almost exclusively male account of the world.' BPM portraiture posed a challenge to commercial imagery stereotyping fat people as social outcasts. Avid selfie-takers made pictures because:

> *I don't see fat hanging from most peoples bodies in the media. I would love to see people with sagging skin such as arm fat or big bellies.*

(Riley, 24, white Irish, non-binary, 4WF, America)

Despite Instagram's ready association as a facilitator of filtered and manipulated body feminisms (Savolainen, et al., 2020), survey respondents clarified that they did not align their platform usage with body augmentation and objectification. Alternatively, selfies offered network users the opportunity to normalise fat-positive femininities in our visual landscape.

Chapter Three outlined how social constructionist feminists define agency as when women resist oppressive gendered expectations in an active 'reconsolidation of norms' (Butler, 1997, p.29). Through surveying, participants disclosed that meme-making and bikini selfies were embarked

upon to promote size inclusivity and grant representation to larger marginalised bodies:

> *My body is not the traditionally desired body in mainstream media. Therefore, bodies like mine aren't showcased, not given representation in tv, movies and magazines. Instagram allows those with alternative bodies to be represented....*

> *it rejects the idea that thin bodies should have better opportunities, more privileges and better access to things like healthcare, education, jobs, and airplane seats.*

> (Dawn, 29, mixed-race, female, 4WF, America)

These statements supplied by practising hashtaggers adhere to established understandings of agentic behaviour. For instance, bell hooks (1992, p.116) previously described how: 'even in the worst cases of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination, that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.'

A fatphobic existing world order, privileging thin embodiment, was being actively reassessed through the lens of BPM Instagrammers. In addition, BPM campaign rhetoric synchronises with earlier expressions of fat feminist activism. Figure 6.8 features protest artwork from 1990s feminist newsletter, *Fat Women's News*. This archive artefact conveys how issues surrounding denial of public space, a lack of size inclusivity and challenging public prejudice have long been countered through grassroots imaging of fat female bodies.

Survey responses suggested that meaningful feminist counternarratives continued to be transmitted today, via virtual image creation. Feminist literature suggests that the body can only be classified as a protest site when there is evidence of a 'battle for authority' and opposing forces are engaged in struggle (Munford & Waters, 2014, p.153). BPM content met this criterion, in how users confirmed they did not create content to court male attention, nor conform to heteronormative ideologies. Women were visually re-presenting themselves as an expression of rebellion.

WE WILL FIGHT ALL FORMS OF FAT OPPRESSION.

Figure 6.8

Fat feminism has retrospectively fought against everyday oppressions, via picture production, as shown in this activist artwork from Fat Women's News (c.1990s).

Source: Nettie Pollard Collection, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

Survey respondent, Denise feels her fat body has been negatively regarded all her life despite having good overall health, such as normal blood pressure and cholesterol readings. Instagram's photographic tools granted an outlet to publicly portray her fat black body through positive photographic reassessment:

> *The bodily focus is the point. We aren't talking about women's brains. We are saying that – "my body is not disgusting or shameful."*

(Denise, 38, black, female, 4WF, America)

Findings suggested that self-portraiture was not the product of empty posturing to assimilate objectifying narratives, but evidenced active reclamation of the fat female self. Earlier findings in Chapter Five reported how Instagram community guidelines mediate which body types gain visibility on their platform. However, Instagram users overwhelmingly testified that they at least approached their photo production with fat feminist activist aims.

Through virtual editorial freedoms, Instagrammers felt empowered on the basis that the patriarchal hold over their body narratives had been, at least partially, alleviated. Survey data confirmed that BPM self-portraiture was not reflective of a collectively superficial and narcissistic vanity project. Chapter One reviewed literature suggesting that women have historically adopted the trending 'tools of production,' to further the cause of gender equality (Drüeke & Elke Zobl, 2012, p.11). Qualitative statements confirmed that the BPM were relying on new media to make a new wave of feminism known. Roisin aligns her digital behaviours with the cause because:

> *I think it's [selfies] one of the most powerful tools we have. Marginalised bodies are constantly being made invisible. By making them both visible and in such a high impact way, we change the norm…*
>
> *The fat community is so full of love and so full of amazing people, just getting on with their lives as they have always been - except they can make themselves SEEN. I love it!*
>
> (Roisin, 38, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

The ability to choose and exert control over the framing of female fatness signified an empowering development.

Across time, patriarchal power relations have meant the tools of production remained concentrated with an elite few. Stuart Hall (1978, p.59) notably referred to these powerful parties as 'primary definers,' who secure social control by setting cultural agendas from the highest echelons of hierarchical structures. Throughout the history of art, cultural output has been fixated with the female nude (McCormack, 2021), yet as mediated through the male gaze of fine art's grandmasters (Mead, 1992). A newfound sense of empowerment was experienced when Instagram allowed women to achieve disentanglement from established sexist scripts:

> *I believe that by posting and celebrating photos of ourselves we are, to a certain extent, taking control of the narrative around women's bodies. Historically this narrative has been written first by and for men, and then consumerism. This is the first time in history women have had the chance to write it ourselves.*
>
> (Kimberley, 39, white, female, 4WF, America)

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Feminist freedoms were experienced from the curatorial flexibility the platform offered by hosting a diversified interpretation of the fat female form. A prominent thematic thread established from my dataset was this collective sense that the flattened hierarchies of social media production were being efficiently exploited to bestow visibility on traditionally 'unacceptable' bodies.

Fig. 6.9

Do you think Instagram gives you more control than mainstream media over how your body is represented?

Yes	428 (85.9%)
No	70 (14.1%)
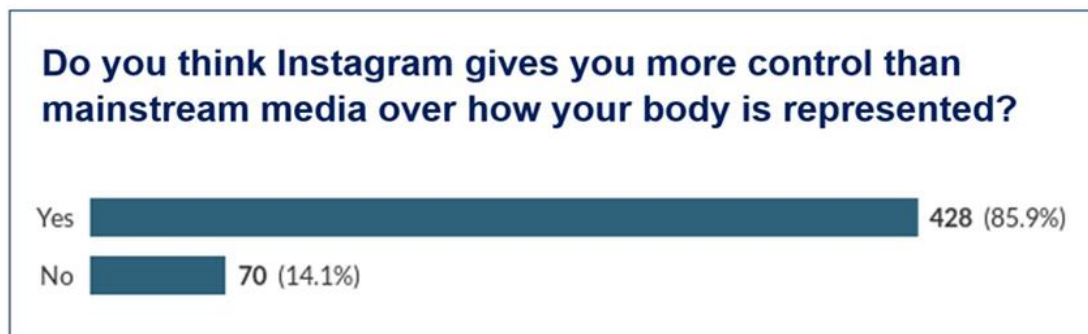
When surveyed, a strong majority (85.9%, n=428) of BPM hashtaggers voiced that Instagram had granted them more control than mainstream media over bodily representation (See Fig. 6.9). This was deemed an empowering experience by those taking part. Imagery can be used as a meaningful method of claims-making in the dismantling of hegemonic ideals. Descriptive data supported these trends pinpointed from statistical lines of enquiry:

> *Instagram and social media in general allows women who don't meet the media's narrow beauty norms to show that they exist. I wish that I had had access to something like it when I was a teenager full of self loathing and hate for myself and my body…*
>
> *Just proving that fat women exist, have good lives, do normal stuff, wear cool clothes and aren't ashamed of how they look and who aren't trying to change their body to fit social norms is SO POWERFUL.*
>
> (Millie, 48, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

My findings consequently support Caldeira's (2021, p.5) recent observations that Instagram is not 'just about Instagram models' and the platform's 'gendered political potential' resides in its expansion of who is deemed 'photographable.'

Fat Chat Podcast (2020)

Survey statements testified that body-baring portraiture had enabled women to occupy Instagram as a critical protest site and exercise narrative agency. There is significant crossover between my survey and participant observation data in this regard. On Sunday 1st March 2020, I attended the very first live recording of the Fat Chat Podcast at Boulevard Theatre, Soho (See Fig 6.10). Three BPM Instagrammers – Rivkie Baum (@rivkiestyles), Georgina Horne (@fullerfigurefullerbust) and Hayley Stewart (@curvesncurlsuk) are the podcast's producers. The theme of that evening's episode was representation. All three social media influencers shared their own struggles growing up in bigger bodies. Topics such as Fat Monica from sitcom, *Friends* were referenced for symbolising negative stereotypes where skinny women are 'placed in a fat suit just for lolz.'

Figure 6.10

Images documenting the live Fat Chat Podcast recording, Boulevard Theatre, Soho.

Source: Author's Own Fieldwork Photography (2020)

For content creators, empowerment emanated from overthrowing a gendered status quo, that ascribes the fat female body with this 'innate funniness' as an unquestioned 'site of comedy' and 'butt of a joke' (Hole, 2003, p.315). Citizen media was seen as a source of editorial escapism and refuge. Throughout my observation of Fat Chat Podcast discussion, image

production was deemed empowering because narrative overhaul made Instagrammers feel in charge when circulating fat-positive framings, more conducive to their wellbeing.

In 1983, fat acceptance activist, Nancy Roberts exclaimed: 'Shops should start offering big women dresses rather than dust-sheets! In the past, the choice has been to wear outsize sacks or stay at home' (Roberts quoted in Dowdeswell, 1983, p.79). Comparatively, Fat Chat Podcast material inclusively repositions fat femininity within, and not 'other' to, the fashion world; further exemplified by the fact Rivkie Baum is founder of plus-size fashion magazine, *SLiNK*. Networked tools of audio and visual production allow creative women to feel empowered through being radically positive about body types shunned by mainstream media and society.

Before-and-Afters

Another working example of how fat female empowerment is experienced, via radical content creation, can be observed through subversion of the Before-and-After trope. In Chapter Three, 19th century archive material was used to illustrate the longevity and stylistic features of this fat-shaming visual spectacle. Karakuş (2020, p.162) suggests the placement of bodies in 'improper' places can generate political effects. Karakuş (2020, p.162) expands: 'Our bodies inhabit the borderlines of the natural and the constructed, the marvelous [sic] and the mundane. Neither biological givens nor passive sites of inscription, they represent stunning political interventions.' The feminist activism and agency of the BPM was most evident through a shared commitment towards transmitting revamped body realities. A key example of one of the ways rebuttals are achieved is through photographic sabotage of the Before-and-After format. This spirit of defiance is captured in Figure 6.11. The meme illustrates how images are used to rebel against the mainstream placement of female fatness within these stigmatising social scenarios. Alongside the intimate selfie, the text reads: 'I am not a "before" and I will not spend my life chasing an impossible "after."'
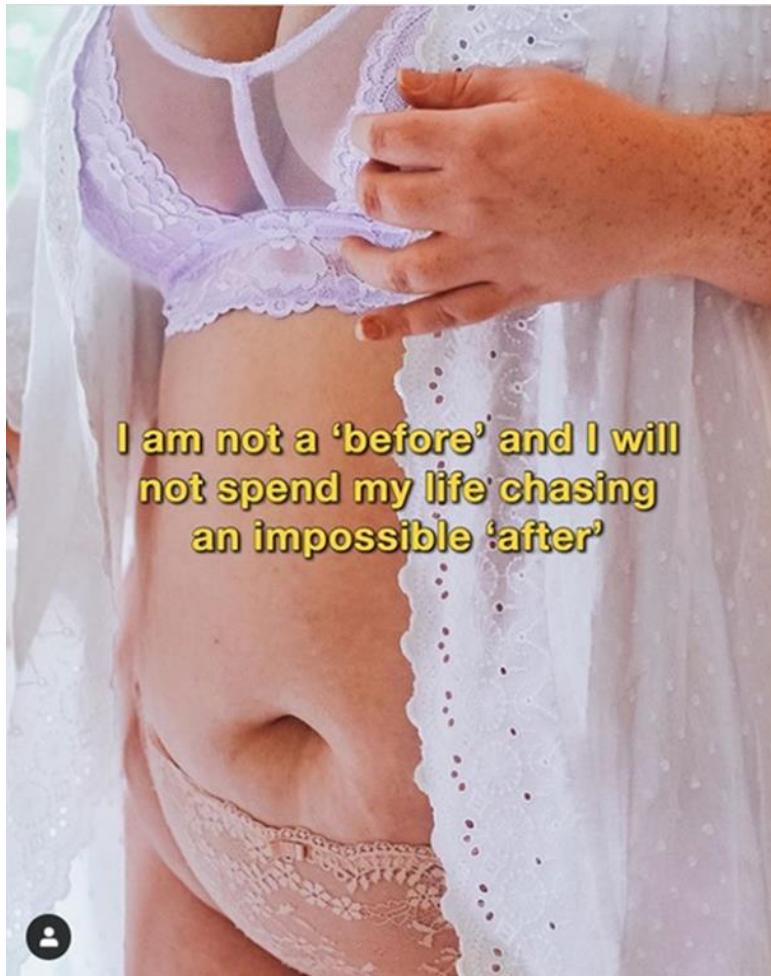
Figure 6.11

An Instagram meme, incorporating the body and Instagram, to coordinate visual resistance against patriarchal body policing.

Source:
Sherry Ivy (2020)

Printed with written permission.

When questioned, 23.9% (n=118) of hashtaggers confirmed they had participated in mocking the Before-and-After, via self-shooting (See Fig. 6.2). The collation of thick descriptive data helped to clarify that assimilation was not part of BPM activist agendas. Those surveyed rationalised why extroverted visual behaviours were integral to BPM image events:

> *Being visible helps, showing people they can exist being fat, they can be happy, successful and all the other things can be powerful when you've only seen fat people portrayed in a negative way…*

> *At least bodies like mine are on Instagram, fat bodies are mostly used in a negative way if they are ever used in mainstream media, or as before/after.*

> (Ann, 32, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

The proactive positive reframing of fat identity was experienced as empowering, when articulated within a cultural context that systemically villainises feminine fatness as deviant behaviour.

Over centuries, the Before-and-After has become a fixture of Western mainstream media, delimiting female agency to shallow physical reformation (Featherstone, 2001, p.196). The trope thrives on fat-shaming women into calorie-counting compliance by juxtaposing images of faulty fatness and inspirational thinness side-by-side. Figure 6.12 presents an archive example of a Before-and-After from 1905, where fat femininity is objectified and exploited through imaging to market Kellogg's Obesity Food. This fatphobic feature is understood as anti-feminist because it prioritises 'submissive' comportment, while endorsing patriarchal ideologies that women 'should' devote excessive amounts of time disciplining their bodies to be decorative and slight in stature (Rothblum, 1994, p.71).

Figure 6.12

Kellogg's Obesity Food advertisement (1905)

The Before-and-After cruelly depicts fat femininity as a self-improvement project, where the promise of slimming can 'free you from suffering.'

As part of diet culture discourse, fat has been historically objectified for profit, to signify a dehumanised and rectifiable form of embodiment.

Source:
New-York Tribune (1905, p.20)

Through Before-and-After images, fatness is customarily framed as an abhorrent state of self-improvement, rather than a legitimate state of being. User-generated Instagram image production was experienced as empowering, on the basis that hashtaggers could relieve their fat identities from cruel processes of objectifying appropriation:

> *Instagram is a way to show the world that we live happily and unapologetic lives in our fat body while on mainstream media bodies like ours are represented as a failure, as a before picture, in ridicule or grotesque way.*

(Gianna, white, female, 4WF, Italy)

Research data reflected how selfie-takers were not sleepwalking into sexist trappings. Instead, their pictures signalled autonomous attempts to generate politically progressive visual body narratives, which redressed gendered diatribes of exclusion.

Fig. 6.13

Feminists have historically campaigned for women to 'reclaim space' because female fatness has been presented as problematic. In the course of your use, do you think that Instagram offers a space where the stigma surrounding fatness can be overcome through fat celebration?

Yes — 333 (67.5%)
No — 60 (12.2%)
Don't Know — 100 (20.3%)
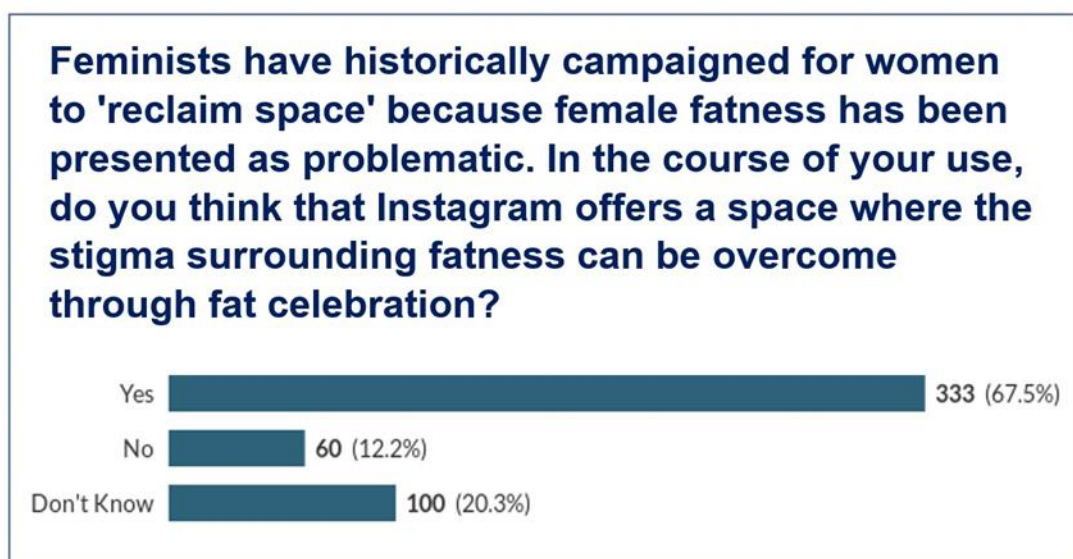
When questioned, most hashtaggers (67.5%, n=333) believed Instagram could be implemented as a platform for fat celebration to counter stigma (See Fig. 6.13). Feminist thinker, Adrienne Rich (1979) once conceptualised activism as 'being disloyal to civilization [sic],' in opposition to ascribed disadvantaged societal positions held within patriarchal systems of knowledge. By performing radical fat-positive femininities, hashtaggers are

carrying out the work of hashtag feminism through collective refusal to obey 'derisory' narratives commanding their bodies 'morph' towards 'attractive' slenderness (Lupton, 2018, p.53). These statistically significant patterns prevalent in quantitative data collection were elaborated on through qualitative survey sections:

> *I am trying to help people change their mindset that there is only one option, to blend in as the "good fatty". People are more than that, and should be happy with how they are now, not who they are being told they should be.*

> (Geri, 38, white, female, Britain)

Exhibitionism became understood as a form of public appeal designed to shift collective consciousness and rejuvenate societal expectations. BPM Instagrammers were storying fat female femininity within purposefully revised scripts. Fat feminist activist, Stacey Bias (2016, p.1) defines the 'good fatty' as a person who is 'trying or at least *believes* they should be trying to no longer be a fatty.' Women were empowered through picture-making that performed body narratives removed from these associations of stigma and shame.

Survey research found that women were railing against oppressive classifications problematising markers of feminine fatness as 'defective' within diet culture discourse. Emotive data imparted clarity over a sense of collective movement message, plus fresh insight into the feminist political motivations commonly underlying Instagram image production:

> *I reject that we are before pictures, I reject we have to change our features to be accepted or loved. I reject that our weight is linked to our value in society.*

> (Chelsea, 32, white, female, 4WF, America)

In Chapter Three, extensive consideration was dedicated to the feminist social constructionist perspective. These theorisations were orientated in the belief that there was not a singular definitive way to embody fat female identities. Political activism and agency were seen as stemming from a woman's choice to enact emancipatory alternatives, or to refer directly back to Naomi Wolf (1990, p.290) from Chapter Three: 'You do not win by

struggling to the top of a caste system, you win by refusing to be trapped within one at all.'
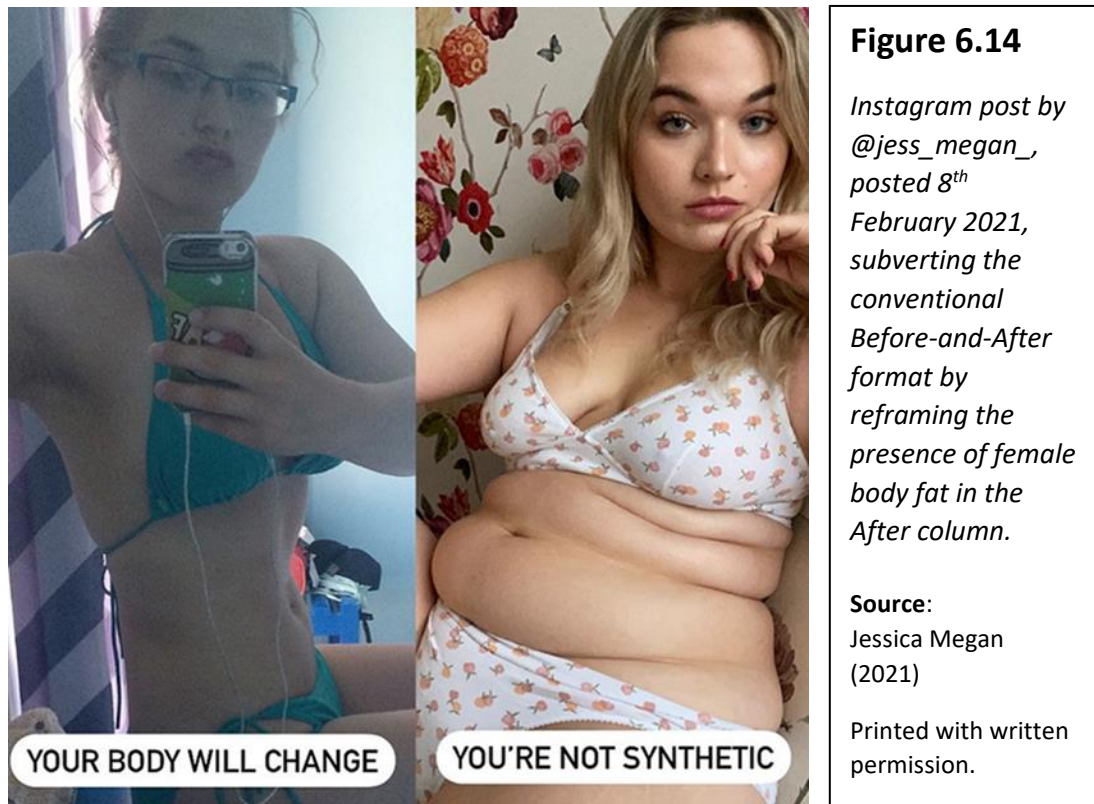
By rejecting common cultural placement of the female body within traditionally oppressive framings, through content creation, BPM Instagrammers were circumventing fat-shaming narratives. Alex was motivated to join the BPM following the lack of respect men showed for her body by making derogative jokes about it. Therefore, her self-described feminist activism was grounded in a refusal to accept an imposed subordinate status, and certainly not vested in appeasing male gratification:

> *Body positive rejects the concept that there is solely the "desired" body type and to accept your body the way it is. Body positive is to make you feel proud/confident of what others may shame you for.*

(Alex, 23, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

Empowerment was experienced by hashtag feminists through using images to construct a counternarrative to weight-based gendered oppression. Figure 6.14 features a real-life BPM take on the Before-and-After feature. Although Jessica Megan uses flat images, this is not to prolong passivity of

the female form, but to point out quite the opposite, that women's bodies are not still and subservient objects. The selfies are accompanied by text which reads: 'Your body will change. You're not synthetic.' In turn, this image event contests objectifying framings of the female body, as both, a static unfeeling sex symbol and as an improvement project disciplined to meet beauty codes under surveillance of the male gaze.

Survey respondent, Lavinia is a nutritionist who attends a body positive book club. She explained why the role reversal initiated by BPM photographic processes is experienced as empowering:

> *I believe that by posting my own pictures in a positive light, it fights the narrow beauty standards inherently.*

> (Lavinia, 43, white, female, America)

Postfeminist commentary suggested that an increasingly inward-focus towards female empowerment being enacted through the makeover paradigm signalled the 'end' of feminism (McRobbie, 2009). An aesthetic fixation is said to reflect the 'aftermath of feminism' as female freedoms are superficially pursued through body transformation (McRobbie, 2009, p.32). However, survey data suggested that the distinguishable difference with #BodyPositive hashtag feminism rested with how the body was being implemented as a protest site to challenge, not adhere to, oppressive beauty ideologies. Irreconcilable with McRobbie's (2009, p.24) critique of 'feminism undone' typified by 'a politics of disarticulation,' testimonies confirmed that image events articulated a political will, yet one innovatively channelled through picture-based performance.

Exhibitionism v Empowerment

The external labelling of selfie-empowerment behaviours as acts of objectification is an outcome of social conditioning, reinforcing female bodily displays as sexual, within hetero-normative patriarchal framings. Radha S. Hegde (1996, p.310) reminds, 'theoretical frames that assume an individual's complete control over action [can be] highly problematic' particularly 'when representing women's experiences.' The case of BPM picture-based

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resistance is no exception. Hegde (1996, p.310) clarifies that a woman's agency is 'subject to curtailment through the control of discursive practices that reinscribe and reproduce positions of subordination.'
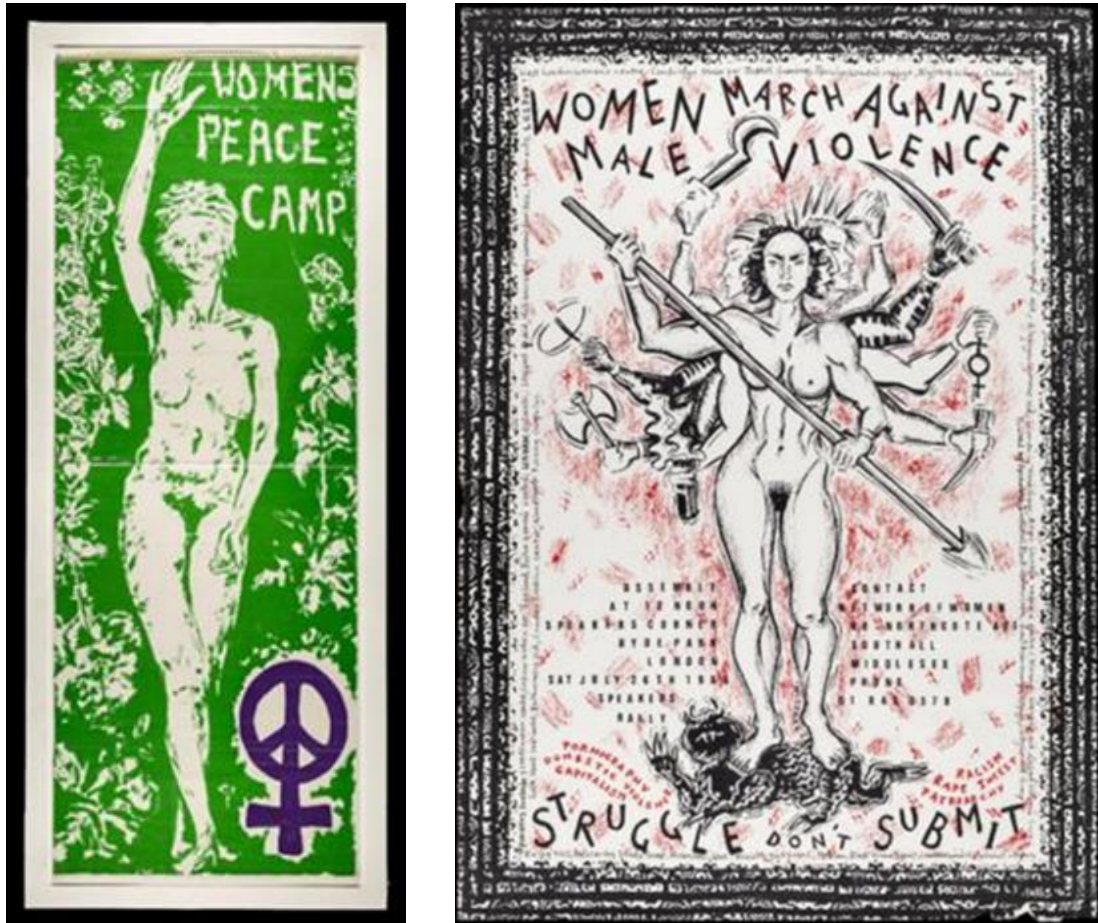
Figure 6.15

1980s printed protest objects convey the naked body's established status as a feminist protest symbol, surpassing sex symbol assumptions.

Source: Greenham Women's Peace Camp Poster (1983) & Network of Women, Middlesex – Women March Against Male Violence Poster (1986), LSE Women's Library

The curtailment, imposed by surrounding patriarchal systems, was felt by frustrated fourth-wave feminists attempting to normalise inclusive body narratives through image events. Gayle is a survey respondent who provided one such perspective. Following a raw food diet, Gayle gained weight, contributing to what she deemed a 'history of diet failures.' She has lived experience of growing up 'chubby' and uses Instagram to counter fat exclusion:

> *It rejects the concept that fat should be demonised and that the people with more of it are lazy, unworthy, not beautiful and unloveable…*
>
> *Sexualising the movement or a women's body is asking for value to be placed on it by another human, generally a man. This gives the message that fat women need to be objectified to be worthy or valued by society. I think this goes against the body positivity movement.*

(Gayle, 32, white, female, Australia)

When female embodiment is only understood in connection with how it impacts the male gaze, a woman's bodily autonomy and agency is denied. Excessive debate about objectification makes the ensuing dialogue all about men. There is a need to eschew phallocentric cultural indoctrination and appreciate the body positive body's role in visual arguments, situated to unsettle and destabilise the status quo.

Feminist archive artefacts (See Fig. 6.15) show that from women's peace camps to marches against male violence, nude iconography has been adopted as a protest symbol. An overemphasis on hegemonic scripts, prioritising unclothed subservience to male sexual gratification, means that a sense of patriarchal entitlement and ownership is perpetuated. For example, Scarlett indicated she exploits Instagram's visuality to reject diet culture, while underlining that undressing can serve an important function in embodied resistance. Scarlett has been diagnosed with anxiety disorder prohibiting participation in physical protest. Through publishing bikini selfies however, photographic virtual mediums facilitate expression of her feminist identity:

> *Clothing morphs and hides our true forms and it's only through this movement that I have seen other people with "oddities" like my own and that is the most empowering thing. I also do not think nudity is inherently sexual — it is people's gaze that should look to be altered…*
>
> *it has allowed me to connect with others that are representing bigger folx[12] and the underrepresented.*

(Scarlett, 27, white, female, 4WF, Britain*)*

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[12] FOLX is an umbrella term used to identify people with a non-normative sexual orientation or identity.

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To assume that the disrobing of a woman's body is an opportunity for objectification, as opposed to an opportunity to exert bodily autonomy, is to succumb to sexist epistemologies. Under a male-serving social order, nude female bodies have been predominantly framed as products for male titillation. The dominant order asserts a dominant reading of feminine embodiment to serve the needs of those at the top of the power hierarchy. Yet, as decades of feminist activism attest, these bodies belong to women.

My research confirms that through exhibitionist photographic processes, women are breaking the cycle of weight control as social control within gender inequal societies. Existing literature prioritises a woman's possession of control over her own life when assessing instances of female empowerment (Takhar, 2013). Critical feminist theorists, Lugones & Spelman (1983, p.573) expand by declaring agentic voice is achieved when women are 'leading a life rather than being led through it' because 'being silenced in one's own account of one's life is a kind of amputation that signals oppression.' Many hashtag feminists experienced exhibitionism as an empowering activity because autonomous camerawork allowed them to gain curatorial control against overriding tyrannical beauty standards.

For instance, Nora was bullied most of her childhood for being fat. Nowadays, she uses Instagram to revolt against fat stigmatisation by celebrating postpartum bodies, via selfies. Nora dedicates 10-15 hours per week to sharing imagery featuring weight gain, cellulite and C-section scars in opposition to what she terms 'male standards:'

> *I think normalizing the body is a great way to reduce the taboo of nudity, that nudity automatically equals pornography. I feel like it helps women regain control on their bodies.*

(Nora, 30, white, female, 4WF, America)

A leading research objective was to discover if visual mobilisation strategies were considered acts of 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004), in response to feminist concerns regarding aesthetical fixation and objectification. An arising theme from my dataset was this notion

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that pictures were being used to revolt against engrained social prejudice positioning feminine naked embodiment principally with serving men's needs.

Following feminist social constructionist theorisations explored in Chapter Three, sexualised connotations are forged from within man-made world orders and projected onto exposed female bodies. These are masculine framings, which mediate the effectivity of BPM staged shows of self-display aimed to maximise deviant body visibility. This position was strongly endorsed throughout my dataset. BPM members felt empowered by mobilising Instagram as an instrument to overcome internalised misogyny. Contrary to antiquated framings, findings showed that body selfies were experienced as empowering by those staging them because they served the needs of women and non-binary persons.

I make an original contribution to knowledge by amending the state of derecognition when it comes to how the unclothed body is choreographed with political purpose. For example, survey testimonials documented the rationales and social change incentives behind user's selfies. Many believed photographical body portraits should be rightfully classified as political statements:

> *For me, being nude was a way to expose my impairment and the ways my body has been altered by surgery, disability etc.*

(Tyler, 36, white, non-binary, Britain)

Fourth-wave feminism is commonly associated with a collective concern for identity politics. Survey respondent, Ruby considered the selfie instrumental to granting renewed positive focus to socially ostracised and underrepresented identities:

> *It challenges the idea that fat, disabled, or trans people should hide their bodies, and normalises all different types of bodies which is SO important.*

(Ruby, 29, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

By applying blinkered notions to the analysis of activism and agency, collective understanding about new platforms of protest can never be

advanced. To admonish selfie-empowerment as objectification, because the protest logic fails to adhere to long-held definitions, is to write off the political efforts of a feminist fourth wave that use their bodies and SNSs as the basis for claims-making.

The body was found to be an active agent performing an important function in countering narratives of exclusion. Nevertheless, if stale ideologies continue to align feminine nudity with male lustful stares, then this will be to the detriment of comprehending the female form's role as an agentic apparatus in social change advocation. A point attested on numerous counts by those surveyed:

> *There's nothing shameful about nudity. The idea of women's bodies being something to be hidden is a tool of the patriarchy. We've all been exposed to nudity in all forms of media. Rarely are these images diverse. They are white, thin, able-bodied people. For some people seeing nude image[s] on Instagram of a person in a larger body, or another form of marginalisation, can be hugely liberating.*

> (Shirley, 31, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

Allegations that BPM members were passively compliant in their own self-objectification were vehemently denied throughout my dataset. Nude, fat, female, unmodified bodies were being filmed to make the unseen become seen, to go against their deletion from the visual landscape, built from man-made codes of femininity. The body and Instagram were found to be conjointly used as sites of protest because BPM activism was motivated by the amplification of forgotten female figures. Through surveying, I was able to engage in a rich qualitative dialogue with practising BPM Instagrammers who defined their selfies as part of a wilful rebellion against a prolonged period of imposed silencing and invisibility.

During my research, women went on record to declare how SNSs were providing innovative tools to express their empowerment. These mobilisation strategies differ greatly from the traditional trappings of street and soapbox approaches. Selfie-empowerment exists outside of male-centric mechanisms of expressing political consciousness. The BPM's screen-

based strategies nevertheless deserve to be taken seriously and not always rerouted into male-defined structures of understanding. They warrant assessment in their own right. This thesis diverts focus from the heteronormative male social actor, the rational protagonist of much previous social movement study, to expand insight about unfolding gendered digital dissent.

Many women surveyed resented the idea that their bodily autonomy and movement message were being undermined through continual concern for unseen male spectators. Catalina stressed that BPM hashtagging networks provided a space where she could achieve connectivity with fellow fat women from around the world to engage in activism. From her perspective, any sexualising motives were disregarded as intrusive outside misinterpretation, attempting to detract from a purposive fat feminist mission:

> *The naked body is not a reason for sexualization and objectification. We are born naked and our body is the only property that really belongs to us.*
>
> *Objectification is given on account of who looks at me as an object or as something sexual. It is not me or the term we should change. It is people who see me this way that must deconstruct their macho thoughts. There is nothing wrong with my breasts, my nipples or my ass. There is something wrong with those who sexualize and objectify my body parts.*
>
> (Catalina, 29, mixed-race, female, 4WF, South America)

My research is about fat feminist activism and the BPM's political purpose could not be achieved by cowering the body away from prying predatory eyes. Nudity was found to be a functional part of exhibiting female fatness to meet feminist ends.

Moreover, my survey data contained the testimony of Jodie, a rape survivor whose hashtag activism began with participation in the #MeToo movement. Selfies provide Jodie with a way of rekindling her relationship with her own body following such a violation. Jodie staunchly denies her selfie-taking is broached with the view to self-objectify and entertain male audiences; while conceding digital bodily display does mean she is subjected to daily

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harassment from men. Jodie, however, aligns her actions with fourth-wave feminist affiliation and devotes between 10-15 hours per week to this cause. Surveying helped to clarify hashtivist orientations, such as how Jodie reasoned that nudity simply constitutes a logistical reality when campaigning for fat-positive visibility:

> *Nudity is the best way to show your real body. You don't have clothes to hide your fat.*

> (Jodie, 27, white, female, 4WF, America)

BPM staged examples of self-portraiture were ultimately found to have more in common with social change advocation, than strip clubs and Ariel Levy's (2006, p.93) notion of the FCP, mentioned in Chapter One.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the presentation of my survey data, which was analysed in accordance with a feminist framework. A key underlying research objective was to investigate whether visual mobilisation strategies were considered acts of 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004) by those taking part. Deployment of the online survey instrument successfully gained access to the political subjects responsible for mobilising selfie-empowerment. My research objective was met by interrogating the performers of this new media form of feminism about old feminist concerns. Namely the risk that embodied resistance can counterproductively endorse aesthetical fixation and objectification. In providing a platform for hashtag feminist voices, as well as their pictures, knowledge was advanced through exploring the ways that women's liberation is enacted in the screen society.

Hashtaggers generally recounted that they partook in image events to object against fatphobic femininities. Findings concluded that BPM self-shooting behaviours did not evidence objectification, but served to emphasise the multimodal profile of political engagement within computerised cultures. Photographic staples, such as the swimsuit selfie and the Before-and-After, were scrutinised in tandem with postfeminist criticism. Feminist agency is

often defined by exercising control and choice to counter socialisation and 'reject' or 'opt out' against punitive prevailing structures (Bowden & Mummery, 2009, p.136). Protest media was found not to be made with the male gaze in mind. Instead, selfies allowed women to take up space and express norm-defying subjectivities, in public photographic acts of body reclamation. Fat females overwhelmingly testified that positive re-representation was an empowering experience because it defied oppressive processes of stigmatisation and erasure. The next chapter will bring my findings sections to a close by progressing critical conversation on from the social media content considered here, to finalise whether these digital behaviours can be conceptualised as 'social movement' activity.

Chapter 7: Activism or Slacktivism?

Introduction

This chapter concentrates on assessing whether or not active #BodyPositive hashtaggers align themselves with political and activist identities. It presents statistically significant trends, with support from descriptive hashtagger testimonies, in order to determine if Instagram personal profiles are deemed 'political' protest sites. Leading findings convey the presence of political purpose and substantial levels of collective affiliation towards the 'activist' label. With support from a SMT framework, critical dialogue thereafter progresses to present how a sense of coalition and ideological common ground can be located within sporadic and singular hashtagging behaviours.

Across upcoming sections, I argue SNSs have irrevocably transformed 'social movement' activity. The hashtag conveys that mass gatherings no longer always occur on cold nights and crowded streets. Through a hashtag movement, my evidence portrays that frontline feminist protest is online and this transition towards networked technologies necessitates a change in how we think about activism. Chapter Two addressed how hashtivism has been subjected to much derision as 'slacktivism.' I deliver some much-needed empirical balance in this regard by explaining the contextual circumstances surrounding why fat feminist shows of solidarity are often achieved online.

Another research aim is fulfilled by advancing debate regarding if BPM online activity also encompasses physical offline spaces. Critical conclusions are drawn, with further reinforcement from participant observation data, collected during my offline fieldwork. The data presented makes an important contribution to key sociological debates currently challenging the legitimacy of hashtag activism. Chapter Seven stresses that although most Instagrammers did not maintain a 'traditional' protest presence in urban spaces, this lack of direct action should not be wrongfully misconstrued as inaction.

Feminist activist and historian, Sally Alexander (2019, p.x) reflects that

previously 'the democratic voice of women's liberation emerged through conversation and small-group action.' My research departs from existing SNT studies, in its refusal to superficially disregard hashtag feminism as 'activism light.' This chapter imparts new knowledge by centring the lived experiences of the women actually using new media today. It was only once social movement studies stopped talking over these women that insightful discoveries could be made about their activist practice. Chapter Seven details these by presenting how accessibility to physical protest spaces cannot be assumed within patriarchal society, while illustrating that a placard is not always necessary to make a difference.

Is the personal political?

The BPM is an extroverted visual movement with an established online presence, most recently concentrated on a picture-based platform, Instagram. However, extraordinarily little is known about their less visible internal rationales and offline activity. I set out to absorb how technological innovation is impacting the expression of political activism and agency in the digital age. Chapter One established the set of research objectives which were developed accordingly. These focused on discerning whether hashtaggers from Instagram networks possessed political inclinations, and, if so, did these motivations translate into physical direct action.

During data analysis, concerns surrounding a deficit in political purpose and direction within the BPM emerged. Chapter Five illustrated that significant sections from the #BodyPositive hashtagging population were concerned about the onset of co-optation and rising depoliticised propensities. Some Instagrammers surveyed commented on a perceived lack of clarity in collaborative vision. For example, even those Instagrammers who identified as 'fourth-wave feminists' were quick to stress that the personal is not always unquestionably political for everybody involved:

> *I think #metoo is very different to body positive posts because bodyposi is often used by people who go to the gym etc. or by people just posting pics of themselves but not talking about their body really. Also, there isn't tonnes of discussion/community around bodyposi.*

Whereas metoo was about the stories we had to tell and noone used metoo unless they were talking about metoo. So there wasn't random, unrelated things on the hashtag.

*(*Patsy, 47, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

The wealth of experiential testimonies generated by my research shed light on the realities of discursive digital exchanges. BPM hashtaggers were by no means a homogenous mass and the resulting network contained conflicting heterogenous positions.

Bronwyn presented the BPM as an apolitical hashtag movement with muddled meaning. Furthermore, responses supplied by fellow hashtaggers exemplified that aversion to fatness exists both, inside and outside, of the BPM network:

> *I am a nurse and my main belief is health, I would never have my body a size which I think can cause me heath problems. I also think when I was very large I was not happy*

>> (Bronwyn, 37, white, female, Britain)

The SNSs, commonly referenced as 'fourth-wave' platforms, were not wholly used for fourth-wave fat feminist purposes under the #BodyPositive hashtag. Nonetheless, usage of the #BodyPositive hashtag has now surpassed 17m instances. Despite a variety of opinions being hosted within these substantial networked structures, my project was driven by a need to know whether statistically significant shared value structures were still present.

Most notably, when questioned, over half of BPM Instagrammers (53.8%, n=266) indicated that they self-identified as an 'activist' (See Fig. 7.1). This majority position was elaborated upon through qualitative survey sections:

> *In traditional media I only see women with very thin bodies or people speaking ill of being fat and encouraging diets that make us sick. I am a fat woman and I use the body positive movement to have my place of speech…*

> *With the hashtag I hope to find women in the same niche as myself and encourage militancy.*

> *(*Valentina, 29, mixed-race, female, 4WF, South America)

Feminist scholar, Cynthia Carter (2014, pp.643-645) emphasised the importance of channelling 'collaborative anger' during virtual claims making, as an abundance of individualist 'online anti-sexist action' overlooks how broader social change is achieved together. My research found that not only did most hashtaggers self-identify as activists, but descriptive data evidenced the #BodyPositive hashtag was appropriated to purposefully reach out and build collective activist networks with fellow users.

Fig. 7.1

By posting a body positive hashtag on the Instagram platform, do you consider yourself an activist?

Yes	266 (53.8%)
No	228 (46.2%)

Findings showed that personal Instagram profiles are considered to be political protest sites for a considerable proportion of BPM Instagrammers. An observation reinforced when 50.4% (n=249) of respondents agreed that #BodyPositive hashtagging is a form of political resistance (See Fig. 7.2). Many others understandably used social media for its inherent function, simply to socialise. Through thematic supplementary qualitative analysis, it was noted that multiple participants described the hashtag's capability to collate individualised expressions into a unified political drive towards fat positive visibility:

> *I want big bodies to be more visible and hashtags give us a way to do this…*
>
> *I see more and more women fighting for change - a change in how society treats women and fat/plus size people.*
>
> (*Linda, 32, white, female, 4WF, Australia)

These findings are in keeping with Loney-Howes' (2020, p.9) observation that Instagram is surfacing as 'an increasingly important site of resistance' for women to adopt as their protest medium. By initiating direct dialogue with

active members from an online hashtagging community, in-depth knowledge was gained into the motivations and rationales powering BPM virtual information exchanges.

Fig. 7.2

Body positive hashtagging is a form of political resistance.

Agree	249 (50.4%)
Disagree	130 (26.3%)
Don't Know	115 (23.3%)
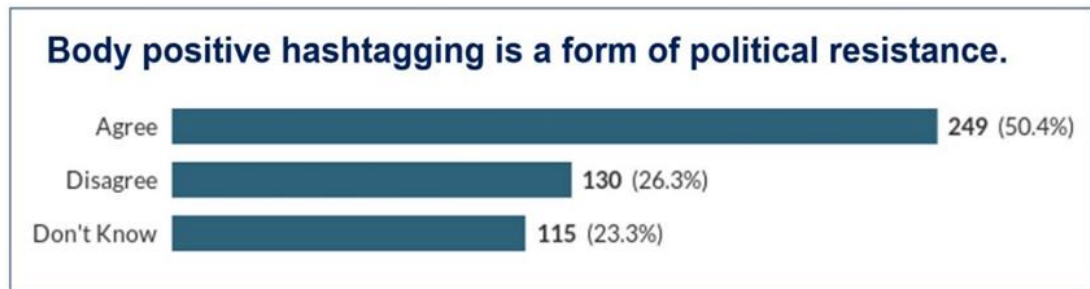
In the interests of furthering my assessment of whether BPM hashtaggers considered their actions 'political,' data findings were reinforced by Melucci's (1989) SMT. The next section utilises his three-point framework as a reference point to guide analysis of the BPM's unconventional protest logics, to ascertain whether they can be reliably classified as a 'social movement.'

Hashtag Activism and Assigning a 'single social unit' status

In accordance with Melucci's (1989, p.29) requirement that members of a social movement should share a single unit status, I sought to establish whether a collective standpoint could be located within a hashtag movement. Chapter Two devoted significant consideration to relating the challenges encountered when embarking on analysis of social media movements. The discursive, transcontinental and non-physical construction of hashtivism makes it difficult to discern if crowds created by hyperlinks share common ground in the same way as collectives organised in traditional urban spaces.

Firstly, high levels of a sense of social movement affiliation were evident. When asked, a strong majority (72.7%, n=359) of #BodyPositive Instagrammers aligned their hashtagging behaviours with being a member of a social movement (See Fig. 7.3). These statistically significant trends with

substantial majority margins were elaborated upon during qualitative survey sections:

> *I have been able to develop relationships with people across North America, Central America, Europe, and Africa!...*
>
> *You can curate your feed so you're only being exposed to those aligned with your message, or your body type and representation…*
>
> *Every time you use a hashtag, you're aligning yourself with everyone else who has used that hashtag…*
>
> *Social media has opened doors of communication on a mass scale that allows more people to share their stories and bring awareness to oppressions that may have flown under the radar for centuries because the oppressed weren't given a platform to use their voice.*
>
> *(Ashleigh, 29, white, female, 4WF, America)*

The hashtag was overwhelmingly used as a means of reaching out through data sharing to find likeminded people. To post on Instagram is an isolated and individualist act; nevertheless, survey evidence strongly suggested that the hashtag was wilfully used to community build and achieve connectivity as part of a more widely perceived single social unit.

Fig. 7.3

Online hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo are often regarded as social movements. When using a body positive hashtag online, do you consider yourself to be a member of a social movement?

Yes 359 (72.7%)
No 135 (27.3%)
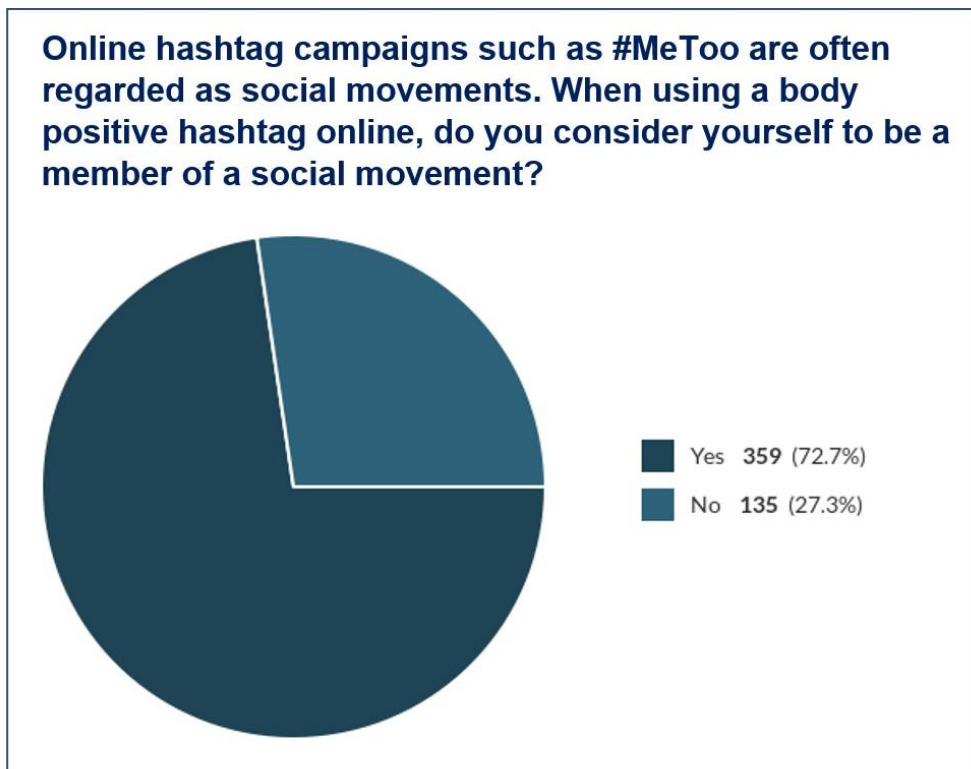
Survey respondents testified that the hashtag networked political positions together, meaning that shared struggle became discursively bound to form a cohesive collective identity:

> *Through hashtags women who share some kind of fat or fat and queer life reality can support each other.*

(Donna, 35, white, female, 4WF, Europe)

Subject-centred data collection revealed the presence of emotional ties. Comments evidenced that a sense of camaraderie existed from the direct perspective of practising hashtag feminists. The idea that independent Instagram behaviours can amount to a single unit status was further reinforced through a readiness to mutually define the BPM as a 'community.' When asked, the majority (n=419, 83.8%) of those using a #BodyPositive hashtag agreed they saw the BPM as a 'community' (Fig. 7.4).

Fig. 7.4

Do you consider the body positive movement to be a community?

Yes — 419 (83.8%)
No — 81 (16.2%)

Collaborative communicative processes were seen to contain sufficient structures of shared fat female struggle for Instagrammers to find interactions cathartic. Testimonies documented the way hashtags performed a newfound borderless searchability when it came to seeking out activist cohorts:

> *As you try to tell people the truth, you come together and become a group. A group where everyone experiences the same things and experiences the same bullying…*
>
> *I feel that I am especially with many women like me…*
>
> *Mainstream media and people for years; big size pretended that there were no people. We are excluded and marginalized people.*

(Ela, 28, mixed-race, female, Turkey)

The data further evidenced that from 500 #BodyPositive hashtaggers questioned, a strong majority position could be discerned regarding a collaborative orientation. With a view to measure if the hashtag functioned to bond geographically dispersed users into a singular activist unit, survey subjects were supplied with a statement. This statement was extracted from *Body Positive Power* (2017), a book published by high-profile BPM Instagrammer, Megan Jayne Crabbe. The excerpt was built into lines of questioning to assess if a working definition of what body positivity meant to individuals from the hashtag network could be established (See Fig. 7.5).

Fig. 7.5

In relation to your own body positive hashtagging experience, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

Body positivity is: 'about accepting our bodies as they are, at any size, and challenging the oppressive systems that teach us we aren't allowed to do that' (Crabbe 2017, p.76)

Strongly Agree	400 (80%)
Agree	82 (16.4%)
Disagree	10 (2%)
Neutral	6 (1.2%)
Strongly Disagree	2 (0.4%)
Don't Know	0

Those surveyed were asked to reflect on their own body positive hashtagging experience and assess how much they agreed with the following statement:

> Body positivity is: 'about accepting our bodies as they are, at any size, and challenging the oppressive systems that teach us we are not allowed to do that' (Crabbe, 2017, p.76).

In response, 80% (n=400) strongly agreed and 16.4% (n=82) agreed with the statement. In fact, only 0.4% (n=2) persons indicated that they strongly disagreed with Crabbe's sentiment. Therefore, this calculated measurement of corroborated opposition against sizeism within #BodyPositive structures evidenced the existence of likeminded thinking.

Survey standpoints were found to comply with Melucci's (1989, p.29) essentialisation of 'actor's mutual recognition that they are part of a single social unit.' Quantitative data trends confirmed that Instagrammers equated hashtag usage with social movement affiliation, while qualitative testimonies clearly signalled the presence of solidarity ties in the BPM.

Assessing the Presence of Conflict

The second pointer from Castells' (1989) social movement classification framework prioritised that group activity was undertaken in conflict with an oppressor. Chapter One discussed how postfeminist literature has accused body positivity of conforming with the gendered objectification of women by seeking social worth from outward presentation. When LYB activism centres on fat bodies authentically showing up in front of camera, a great deal of intimate exposure and 'aesthetic labour' (Elias, et al., 2017, p.31) is entailed. This risks having 'one's entire being identified with the body' as if parts were 'capable of representing her' (Bartky, 1990, p.35).

My study imparts an empirical sense of the BPM's collective ideological drivers. It was only by directly engaging with Instagrammers, about what the BPM seeks to challenge, that I could reliably venture beyond the filters and creative camera angles to transparentise underlying sources of antagonism. As postfeminist thinker, Rosalind Gill (2017, p.235) reminds about onscreen gendered performances of ambivalent imperfection: 'Having a fat body does not necessarily signify a rejection of beauty standards or body norms.'

Women were found to broadly be in conflict with the identities ascribed to them within patriarchal society through engrained beauty standards. When evaluating statistically significant shared attitudinal stances, data showed that the strongest source of conflict within the BPM was an opposition felt towards fatphobia and thin idealisation (n=151). This was followed by a sense of discontent expressed towards oppressive beauty standards in general (n=80). Figure 7.6 features the top ranked sources of cultural conflict expressed by hashtaggers. Notably, only twelve of those questioned

believed the BPM to be apolitical by indicating that it did not reject anything at all. First-hand accounts predominantly supported the conceptualisation of Instagram as a protest platform fundamental to fat fourth-wave identity politics:

> *I use instagram to raise awareness about the oppression of fat people, to advance fat liberation, and to lift up fat activists.*

(Niamh, 36, white Irish, female, America)

Fig. 7.6

What does the Body Positive Movement reject?
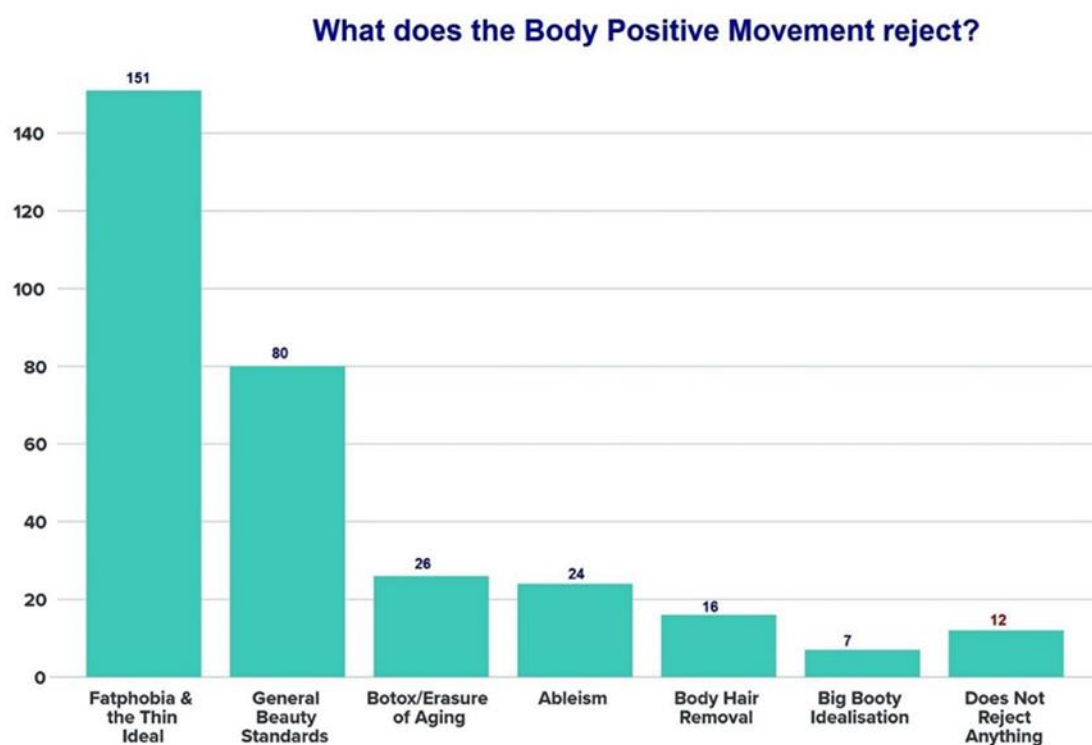
Keira was a survey respondent who had struggled to make it in the modelling industry, due to narrow beauty standards. Keira spends 10-15 hours per week on Instagram in an attempt to contest how:

> *The current "ideal" woman is thin. Her thighs don't touch, but her butt is perky. She has a toned stomach and arms with a low fat index. Jiggle is not acceptable.*

(Keira, 22, white, female, 4WF, America)

Qualitative data drew attention to how fourth-wave feminists are responding to a conflict that exists between slimline patriarchal expectations and their

lived embodied realities. A 2013 YouGov survey indicated that the average British woman wears a size 16, yet this common group is not typically granted mainstream exposure (Dahlgreen, 2013). BoPo Warriors are exhibiting – to quote Keira, their 'jiggle' - on camera to disrupt the stronghold sexist orders have historically enforced through augmented mediations of women's bodies. The covert use of manipulative devices, such as airbrushing or Photoshop, objectifies and places pressure on women to meet unachievable aspirational beauty ideals. Survey data showed that Instagram content creators were rejecting processes of patriarchal interference by posting their own unedited fat embodied realities.

Dominant understandings of 'real' politics and protest centre the rational male actor, while women are found to campaign through lesser championed forms of domestic 'civil resistance' and 'non-cooperation' (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2012). Hashtag feminists detailed how citizen channels granted narrative freedoms to help heal damaged relationships with food and their bodies:

> *Popular media representation of bodies is so incredibly narrow, with the narrative of people needing to have the "perfect" bodies, that just seeing a body that is actually "real" - not airbrushed, has rolls, cellulite etc. can be a relief. I believe we are craving to see bodies that look like ours, and instagram can help with that.*

> (Heidi, 39, white, female, 4WF, America)

Instagrammers are engaged in a non-violent ideological conflict fought with new media tools. Traditionally, top-down editorial structures have highly ranked red-blooded male interests in their news values, whereby journalistic practices are forged in accordance with this elite's preferences (Carter, 2019, p.236). Networked editorial agency is being exploited to critically challenge reductive gendered beauty codes and dehumanising production practices. Empowerment is experienced as an outcome of this newfound control.

Moreover, this mission is reminiscent of earlier efforts made by the late Dame Anita Roddick to introduce 'feminist cosmetics' that disrupted patriarchal body ideologies (Horwell, 2007, np). During 1997, Ruby, a

'Rubenesque' body positive doll, was launched as part of a Body Shop LYB campaign designed to critique constrictive gender stereotypes (Maute & Borchers, 2013, p.4). Alongside Ruby's ample frame, the disclaimer read: 'There are 3 billion women who don't look like supermodels and only 8 who do' (See Fig 7.7). Like BPM self-imaging, Ruby symbolically confronted male-manufactured meanings, designed to diminish female agency, by conventionally associating the fat female body with deficiency and deformity.

Figure 7.7

Ruby became the poster girl for a feminist image event against narrow beauty standards.

Source:
The Body Shop (1997)

Similarly, the political activism and agency of the BPM is evidenced through a collective mission to repopulate the visual landscape with improved fat-positive female representation. Hashtaggers are publicly visualising

liberating body alternatives in the hope of asserting a 'new set of norms' (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.51):

> *I have been fat all my life and saw Instagram and social media more broadly starting to display and give a voice to fat people.*

(Fleur, 35, mixed-race, female, 4WF, Australia)

Survey participants confided that it was an empowering experience to see their own fat female body types finally culturally validated. The BPM is found to be in conflict with a constrictive heteronormative order and their resistance is being articulated through contravening affirmative body performance.

By hashtagging, do you want to generate social change?

Yes	412 (83.1%)
No	19 (3.8%)
Not Sure	65 (13.1%)

Isolating Social Change Objectives

Melucci (1989) stipulated that the isolation of social change objectives within group value structures was essential for collectives to achieve 'social movement' status. When questioned, an overwhelming majority of Instagrammers surveyed (n=412, 83.1%) confirmed that social change aspirations underpinned their hashtagging behaviours (See Fig. 7.8). Qualitative position statements clarified targets chosen by BPM Instagrammers in their body politics, namely social change objectives centred on confronting the predatory diet industry:

> *The whole reason women hate their body is because they are told they constantly need to change it by media and diet culture.*

(Amber, 22, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

Figure 7.9

Below: A body positive swimsuit selfie

Left: 'Summer better than others' (1985) Weight Watchers advertisement using swimsuit imagery to promote aspirational slim ideals and market gendered body discipline regimens.

Source: Heather Mae (2020)
        Printed with written permission.

The News Herald, 30th May 1985, p.4

BPM behaviours adhered to Melucci's (1989) criteria in their pointed devotion to perform fat femininities in a revolutionary positive way, an exercise embarked upon to transform oppressive conditions. Systematic critique was present within the dataset. Danielle is a psychotherapist who specialises in eating disorders treatment. She values how Instagram grants a platform to transmit feminist messages:

> *I treat eating disorders as a psychotherapist, and being body positive, HAES[13] informed, and feminist is vitally necessary in this work…*

---

[13] Health at Every Size (HAES) is a social justice approach to health provision, advocated by Lindo Bacon (2010), demanding that patients are treated with respect and without judgements about their weight.

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I wholeheartedly reject the oppressive and insidious beauty standard that pervade our culture, The pursuit of weight loss is an act of self-harm and self-hatred perpetuated by oppressive systems.

(Danielle, 38, mixed-race, female, 4WF, America)

Hashtagging is approached with a concern for advancing the welfare of women and implementing a positive difference in their life conditions. My dataset contained multiple disclosures from registered healthcare providers who played an active role in an agentic reframing process. BPM members post bikini selfies to outwardly champion body diversity, whereas swimsuit imagery is exploited by weight loss conglomerates to undermine self-esteem and uphold the thin ideal for profit (See Fig. 7.9).

My data collection granted me the opportunity to gather fresh insight into the precursors to participation in the BPM. These were found to be overwhelmingly orientated in a collective dissatisfaction with diet culture. Through the social movement life cycle, theorists have long established that protest emerges from a discontent felt towards an oppressive status quo, which then coalesces into active strategies (Blumer, 1969). In the case of BPM Instagramming, survey data revealed that participation in subversive selfie strategies was foreshadowed by statistically significant adverse shared experiences. A considerable number of those surveyed (n=133, 26.6%) revealed that body image issues and eating disorder recovery had inspired them to first get involved in the BPM (See Fig. 7.10).

Time and time again, the same structure of defiant sentiment surfaced during qualitative thematic analysis. Women reported how they had reached a snap point, whereby they could no longer calorie-count in conformity with rigid beauty standards. Feeling fatigued, many described how they had made an assertive decision to become structurally defiant through the production of contentious fat-positive output. Qualitative disclosures generated new knowledge about the empowerment experienced by women when they relinquished their support of corporate weight maintenance schemes.

Fig. 7.10

Why did you first get involved in the BPM?

14 — Art
1 — Cosplay
10 — Academia
16 — Curve Fashion & Modelling
19 — Dance & Fitness
20 — Blogging "The Fat-o-Sphere"
133 — Body Image Issues & Eating Disorder Recovery
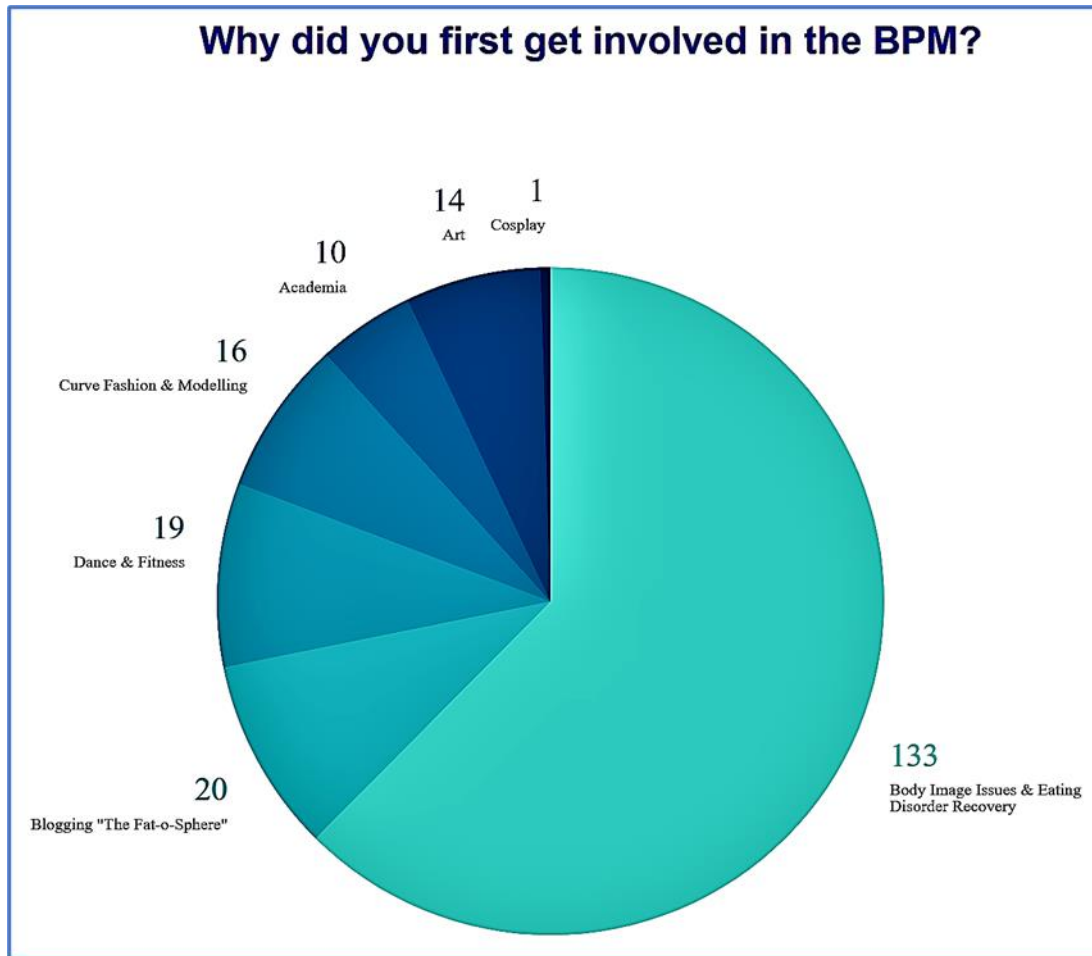
In Britain alone, 100,000 citizens attend a commercial weekly slimming club (Gilbert, 2013, p.9). Contradictorily, longsuffering women documented they were severing their patronage from such stigmatising operations. Instagrammer's bodies were being taken back from patriarchal and profit-driven processes:

> *I've always been overweight since being a teenager. I'm fed up of juice plus, weightwatchers, slimming world, gyms that advertise you should lose weight in order to love yourself. Loving yourself includes loving the weight you're at.*

> (Jess, 31, white, female, Britain)

The activism and agency of BPM Instagrammers is evident through a collective willingness to opt out and defy gendered societal expectations. Hashtag activism is being converted into meaningful action as women are

found to be making consumer choices with real-life consequences, such as withdrawing their financial endorsement of weight loss schemes.

Qualitative testimonies documented changes in collective mindset and showed that established gendered punitive rituals were being disrupted as part of BPM protest. The BPM is found to offer women a critical space to break away from hegemonic femininities and express emancipatory visual alternatives. Across all three criteria outlined by Melucci (1989), survey data provides evidence to suggest BPM behaviours and attitudes comply and can be classified as 'social movement' activity.

Fig. 7.11

Did the Instagram platform first introduce you to the Body Positive movement?

Yes — 217 (62.7%)
No — 129 (37.3%)
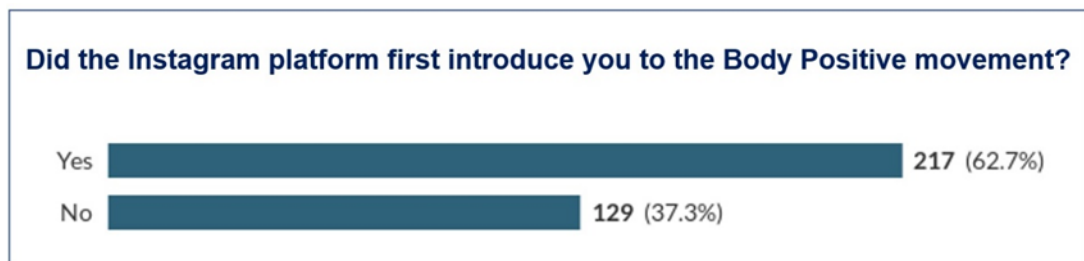
Analysing Offline Activity

This section continues discussion about the BPM's conceptualisation as a social movement, in conjunction with Castells' (2013) SNT qualification that 'activism' must extend into IRL spaces. Most #BodyPositive hashtaggers confirmed (n=217, 62.7%) that the Instagram platform had first introduced them to the BPM (See Fig. 7.11). However, when it comes to consideration of whether this connective online action later transferred into collective offline action, it proved problematic to draw clear conclusions.

Bodyposipanda's Never Say Diet Club Live (2019)

For instance, data revealed that just under half (49.7%, n=249) of those surveyed had met fellow BPM Instagrammers in real life (See Fig. 7.12). Since social media influencers have become big business interests, these levels of potential peer-to-peer political interaction and activist engagement could be exaggerated. In 2019, as part of my participant observation data

collection, I attended Bodyposipanda's Never Say Diet Club Live tour (See Fig. 7.13). Qualitative testimonies revealed that so did a number of those surveyed who listed attendance at this event as an offline pursuit.

Have you ever met any fellow body positive Instagrammers in real life?

Yes 249 (49.7%)
No 252 (50.3%)
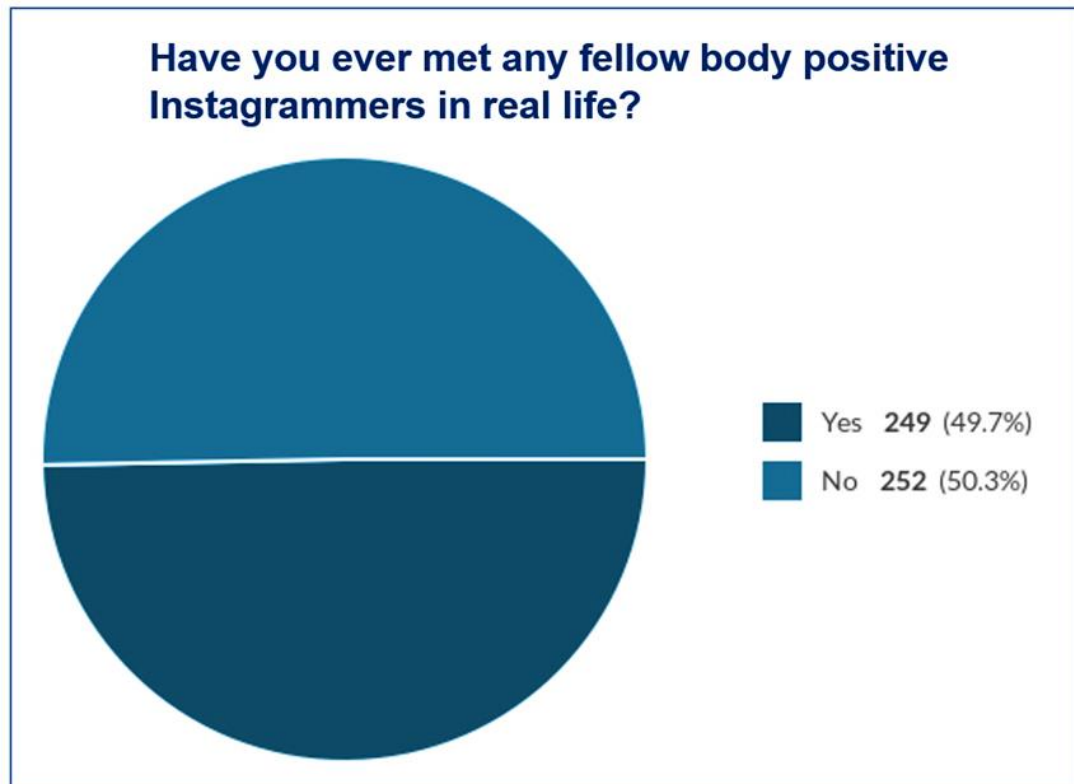
Stella is a feminist who explicitly deems Instagram her 'place of empowerment.' Yet, over time, she felt the need to supplement her hashtag feminism with offscreen pursuits:

> *At first I was just happy to see other women who looked like me and we happy with their appearance. Then i started to chat and comment on some Instagram users and now i have even met in real life some of those people who live close to me. I have also attendes Bodyposipandas tour in Scotland.*

(Stella, 30, white, female, 4WF, Sweden)

Stella embarked on international travel to achieve heightened connectivity with co-members from the BPM network. Those surveyed pinpointed this specific tour as a part of their proactive protest identity, synchronously occupying online and offline spaces.
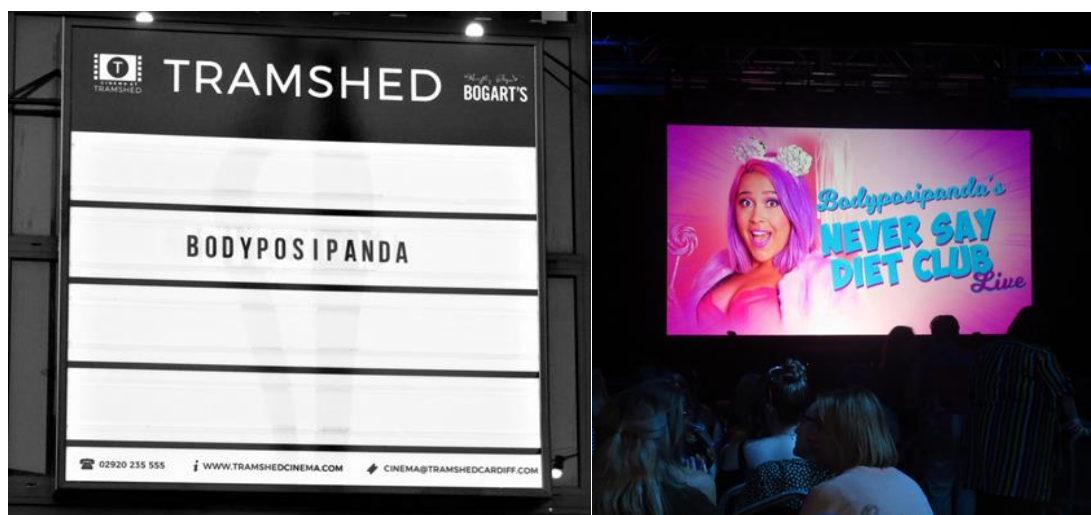
Figure 7.13

Images taken during my attendance at Bodyposipanda's Never Say Diet Club Live event with hundreds of patrons in attendance at The TramShed, Cardiff.

Source: Author's Own Fieldwork Photography (2019)

The star of this travelling roadshow, Megan Jayne Crabbe, is Britain's most high-profile body positive advocate. With over 1.3m followers and corporate endorsement deals with The Body Shop and Curvy Kate lingerie, participation is a means to make a living for some BPM Instagrammers. On the one hand, Crabbe has lobbied Westminster for better eating disorder treatment services alongside charity, Beat. On the other hand, it is important to note that when purchasing my general admission ticket for the show - priced at £20.00 - there was also a VIP option for £40.00, offering a 'Pre-show Meet & Greet with Megan.' This observation was significant because appraisal of offline BPM interactions was clouded by this conflict of interest. I realised that BPM protest was situated within capitalist structures and therefore not equalised, but hierarchical. Theorists have deemed this, 'the rebel sell' (Heath & Potter, 2004).

Contemporary feminist writing (Arruzza, et al., 2019, p.12) is accusatory towards the 'world of social-media celebrity' because it 'confuses feminism with the ascent of individual women.' Feminism becomes a 'trending hashtag,' expressed via 'vehicles of self-promotion,' which is 'deployed less

to liberate the many than to elevate the few' (Arruzza, et al., 2019, p.12). When BPM Instagrammers met up face-to-face, some had to pay for the privilege of meeting others in a business dynamic, indicating that these events were organised primarily for profit and not political purposes. The show's content contained feminist critique of the diet industry, interposed by dance routines and singing ensembles with fellow Instagrammer, Joeley Bishop (@mynameisjoeley). My fieldnotes reflected:

> *The event was like a pop concert, not only because we were all paying punters staring at a stage, but there was colourful lighting and costume changes…*
>
> *A pastel slideshow presentation morphed into karaoke backing tracks…*
>
> *Pockets of women screamed, clapped, hollered, and danced reinforcing the almost 'star' status that certain Instagrammers have garnered.*
>
> *It reminded me of a hen night. There was all-female camaraderie with loud crowds and loud outfits and lots of drinking.*

Nevertheless, these feelgood showpieces did not exist solely to provide an outwardly fat-affirmative counternarrative to diet culture, but for individualist monetary gain. Such corporate interference meant that not all BPM offline peer engagement could reliably be assumed as 'activist' in pursuit.

As noted in Chaper Two, Castells was receptive in his thinking towards how technological innovation has impacted the makeup of contemporary social movements. I responded to his qualifying stipulation that networked advocacy still had to be supplemented by direct action to achieve 'social movement' classification status. A line of enquiry was developed to interrogate Instagrammers and comprehend if they took to the streets, esteemed by Castells as integral sites of citizen unrest, as well as screen-based mediums. When surveyed, just over half (54.8%, n=273) of #BodyPositive hashtaggers stated that they participated in offline body positive activities (See Fig. 7.14).

Fig. 7.14

Aside from using body positive hashtags in public online spaces, do you currently participate in any offline body positive activities?

Yes 273 (54.8%)
No 225 (45.2%)
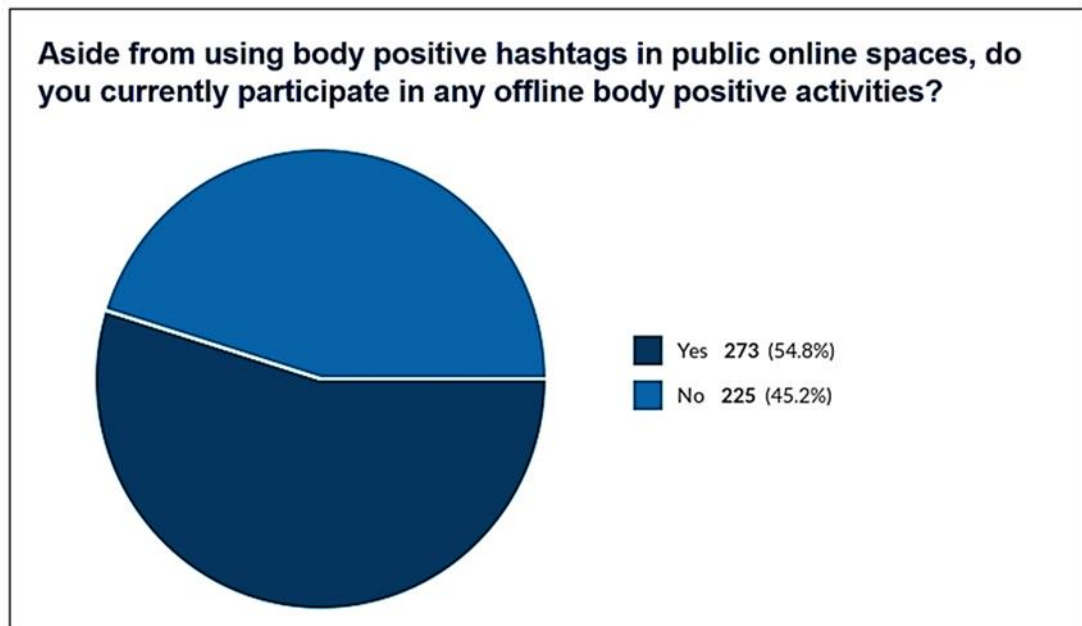
The BPM's choice of offline mobilisation strategies was found to be at odds with Castells' neat and orderly protest ideologies founded on traditional modes of political expression. My survey offered active Instagrammers the opportunity to freely confide what 'offline activities' they were involved in. Many respondents detailed an embodied resistance, casually interwoven with everyday life, as part of an agentic stand against fatphobia. This looser interpretation of what constituted offline activism was evidenced through survey passages offering a young person's perspective on political consciousness in the digital age:

> *I walk around my house naked as a sign of praise to my body. I dance in the mirror, I take selfies everyday, I make YouTube videos about myself.*

(Mia, 19, black, female, 4WF, Europe)

Qualitative survey feedback conveyed that political activism and agency were present in how hashtaggers made a purposive effort to apply body positive principles to offscreen situations. My data revealed that nonetheless this was not achieved through the placards and loudspeaker scenarios magnified in Castells' classification.

These findings support Linda Connolly's (2006, p.11) observation that from the latter half of the 20th century, 'more and more people have been turning their backs on mainstream politics and parties' while 'pursuing more unconventional ways' to achieve 'making themselves heard.' By collecting evidence of this decentralised shift in social change advocacy behaviours, this thesis makes a substantiated claim to revise and refresh stagnant notions of political activism. My data confirms that Connolly's (2006) theoretical suppositions are being translated into unfurling protest practice.

During the 1970s, black fat acceptance writing mobilised women to rebel against cultural signposts imploring they conceal fatness beneath 'tent' dresses and refrain from wearing stripes, plaid or loud colours (Norment, 1978, pp.82-83). Downing Peters (2014, p.57) found women experienced empowerment when purposefully eschewing the 'rules' of 'fat identity formation' through subversive self-fashioning against emulation of a 'flattering' figure. Likewise, my findings reiterate the body's continuing status as a domestic protest site. Those surveyed mutually experienced empowerment through the performance of wardrobe transgressions 'violating the ideal figure of womanhood' (Herndon, 2002, p.120):

> *Literally going out in public wearing whatever I want. I would constitute that as a body positive activity*

> (Kelsey, 24, mixed-race, female, 4WF, America)

In calling for an expansion of the boundaries of political activism, Takhar (2007, p.123) stresses: 'The practices and experiences of political agency can develop through the micro politics of living a life.' Therefore, to quote Kirsty Fife in *From the Gut* (2021, p.35): 'maybe "too much" is a type of politics.' My study shows self-presentation can be instigative when making political statements. Primary data confirmed prescriptive and blinkered ideas surrounding the expression of political identity are being unseated from the established order of chambers and constituencies.

Contrary to stringent conceptualisations of 'political' activism, analysis concludes that the way BoPo Warriors enact their offline activism can be

extremely fluid. My research data revealed that only five (1%) Instagrammers engaged in offline BPM activities that conformed with Castells' (2013) narrow notions of 'social movement' compliance (See Appendix D) such as demonstrations, marches and rallies. Jack Shenker (2019, p.4) has called for a 'new politics' on the basis that established closed definitions of the 'political terrain' need to accommodate shifting practices of civic engagement. In *Now We Have Your Attention: The New Politics of the People*, Shenker (2019, p.4) argues:

> The politics presented to us was commentated on like a sporting event: a spectacle played out by a select few *over there*, something for the rest of us to watch from our sofas, and boo, or cheer. There was little notion of how all this turmoil was entangled with politics in its wider, deeper form: a living thing that runs through all of us and alters ordinary people, and which ordinary people in turn are capable of altering for themselves.

This point is seconded by contemporary social movement scholarship. Shepard (2015) stresses the important contribution community projects and 'outsider networks' make as legitimate expressions of 'social activism.'

For instance, BPM members were found to counter weight stigma by donating their time to eating disorder charities (n=8, 1.6%), while others facilitated therapy (n=16, 3.2%). Those recovering from eating disorders detailed their processes of giving back to their immediate physical communities through outreach projects:

> *I have published an art book/zine about my experience with Bulimia and I run a support group for those struggling with food and body image where body positive talk is the norm.*

> (Brooke, 38, white, female, America)

Transformational offline activism cannot be solely interpreted through pavement-pounding appeals to formally elected governments.

In many ways, this finding regarding a lack of traditional urban occupation is nothing new. Existing studies have called for the adoption of more flexible definitions regarding fields of struggle because alternatives to street protest are commonly adopted by certain groups out of necessity, not choice. The

fat population are a case in point. Aimee N. Taylor's (2016, p.45) study into body positive activism, observed how:

> Internet-ready technologies provide the power to enter and participate… Offline, in real spaces, it can be uncomfortable for fat people to gather in public, believe it or not. People often ridicule, mock and comment when fat people congregate. While this is played off as comedy, the joke is never-ending.

Social justice advocacy is not exclusively conducted in public squares, but can be coordinated behind closed doors. As Taylor (2016) stresses, it is not easy to be visibly fat and vocal in public spaces. This observation was supported by testimonial data from BPM members:

> *I gained significant weight from Raw til 4 diet, and have hypothyroidism making it close to impossible to lose that weight and then keep it off. I have also been chubby throughout highschool and late primary with a history of diet failures…*

> *I think peolple feel more comfortable behind a screen protesting than in person. It can be challenging when you have been stigmatised and often traumatised by society.*

> (Gayle, 32, white, female, Australia)

Rather than relegating body positivity to a 'lesser than' status of political expression, I acknowledge that it is important to comprehend why protest may collectively occur in closed, domestic and more privatised spaces.

My qualitative dataset revealed a wealth of diversity in how political expression and protest identity are formulated in physical communities. Rikowski & Rikowski (2003, np) define a critical space as any place where active critique is made possible. My survey showed that self-realisation and collective consciousness-raising were achieved through body positive book groups (n=5, 1%), whereby ordinary community sites, such as libraries, signified sites for social change. Lindo Bacon (2020, p.20) notes how fat populations exercise 'radical belonging' by reimagining a more inclusive world that caters for them. There is no monolithic way of asserting a protest identity.

Furthermore, protest literature alerted me to how the presence of critical

challenge is more important than the type of space activists occupy. For example, in 2021, *The Fat Zine* published *The Fat Lib Timeline*, a retrospective tracing the fat acceptance activist cycle. This important grassroots document stresses that during the 1980s, 'fat swims' became a staple of lesbian fat activist expression in the San Francisco Bay area (Tonic & Southard Ospina, 2021, p.9). Activities were organised specifically for women weighing over 200 pounds to provide a safe space, plus produce quality-of-life gains by doing so. My survey data evidenced that this offline protest tradition has continued into fourth-wave body positivity:

> *I go to body positive, plus size events like markets, panels, fashion events. I also used to attend "AquaPorko"; synchronised swimming for fatties.*

> (Gemma, 33, white, female, 4WF, Australia)

BPM hashtaggers reported (n=5, 1%) that they took part in 'fat swims,' such as the Fat Babes Club of Columbus, who help FOLX navigate body issues by organising aqua activities in a non-judgemental environment.

Survey data reflected how it is inaccurate, plus out of step with people's adopted strategies, to dismiss activism and agency expressed outside of traditional classifications as apolitical. A number of those surveyed continued an established interrelationship between education and protest. Online interactions aside, Instagrammers were found to be proactive participants in transmitting the BPM message to many face-to-face academic audiences. When questioned 20 (6%) Instagrammers travelled giving lectures and talks, while 12 (2.4%) attended conferences. Survey statements evidenced that those belonging to virtual networks do engage in physical community activism through both, formal and informal education channels:

> *I am a professor of a body justice class at George Washington University in Washington DC and I host a podcast called We Are Still Hungry that promotes and explores diet culture, thin idealism and fat phobia.*

> (Nicola, 44, white, female, 4WF, America)

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Professor for Education, Christine E. Sleeter (1996) situated 'multicultural education' as 'social movement' activity. Reflecting on her experience of how protest politics and informal learning activity overlapped during the 1960s and 1970s, Sleeter (1996, p.239) recalled: 'I could not distinguish workshop leaders from community activists.' Her work accentuates an important point for consideration when appraising BPM protest logics, that protest is not unilaterally expressed through a placard, but through pedagogy. Sleeter (1996, p.239) argues that in the civil rights movement, non-classroom-based education was considered a politically empowering 'social resource' connected with 'jobs, power and self-determination.' Correspondingly, Mirza & Reay (2000, p.521) demanded 'rethinking' social movement classifications to integrate 'organic grassroots' black supplementary schools rightfully as NSM activity.

Traditional SMT's overemphasis on 'political process' activism has meant that - what Charlotte Cooper (2016, p.95) terms 'meta social movements' - remain under scrutinised. These are said to focus on social justice and transformation in the interests of achieving what Butler (2004, p.8) deemed 'liveable lives.' Cooper's (2016, p.95) explanation for such exclusion is that fat activism does not conform with formulaic categories of 'understandable' and 'legitimate' activism. For example, Cooper (2016, p.95) argues stagnant schemas within SMT would fail to see arranging a homestead, in order that somebody could live comfortably fat, as a 'political' act. Size inclusivity surfaced as a key thematic concern amongst BPM members.

Hashtagging aside, survey data evidenced instances of hands-on, retributive, physical community action within the BPM to this social problem. BPM members were found to achieve 'liveable lives' through organising events, such as resourcefully holding fat clothes swaps, which represent another manifestation of overlooked unconventional activism (Warder, 2001, p.160). Research data showed that 3 (0.6%) Instagrammers engaged in offline clothes swap activities and enlisted these events as part of offline interaction:

> *I have participated in clothing swaps, clothing donations, body positive yoga classes, etc.*

(Alice, 27, female, America)

Claims-making for affordable and contemporary plus size fashion was further articulated through organising curve fashion[14] shows (n=9, 1.7%). Survey data emphasised that access to comfortable clothing that fits, in sizes often too difficult to access through mainstream retailers, was seen as a social justice issue.

I respond to pleas from fat activist scholars, such as Cooper (2016), to expand the scope of scholarship around social movement protest to ensure inclusion of new and different forms of activism. When fat feminist articulations do not adhere to prescriptive existing frameworks, this does not necessarily mean they are not 'activism.' Instead, arising 'ambiguous fat activism' raises awareness that we need to readjust and broaden established shared definitions (Cooper, 2016, p.93).

My research is an act of interventionist scholarship in how it challenges SMT's traditional criterion with a critical feminist lens. My findings reflect contemporary ways that women are expressing what they want and need in our screen societies; ways often far removed from incompatible, classical, man-made structures denoting civil discord that went centuries before. It is worth remembering that females have historically organised to bring about social change as part of 'voluntary women's groups,' who did not always identify as feminist (Beaumont, 2020b, p.697). Moreover, as noted in Chapter One, women can possess political consciousness through their autonomous creation of critical spaces (Takhar, 2013). The fluid and non-location-specific nature of female political activism and agency is a theme integral to historic feminist activism (Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

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[14] 'Curve fashion' relates to clothing tailored to meet the proportions of larger than average individuals (Howard, 2018).

Anti Diet Riot Fest (2020)

During my participant observation, there was evidence to suggest that this legacy of occupying informal sites of struggle has continued into fourth-wave feminist expression. In January 2020, I attended Anti Diet Riot Fest, a self-declared 'January rebellion against diet culture.' Conventionally, 'New Year, New You' hyperbole dominates mainstream media during the month of January, endorsing a cycle of intense detox and deprivation following a festive period characterised by self-indulgence and gluttony. In stark contrast, Anti Diet Riot Fest promotional literature presented a fat feminist orientation by explicitly stating: 'Absolutely <u>no</u> diet chat or body shaming allowed!!!!!!!' and 'Losing Weight Is Not Your Sole Purpose' (See Fig. 7.15). It also overtly advertised the presence of: 'Body Positive Activists.' The event was organised by BPM Instagrammer, Becky Young, co-founder of Anti Diet Riot Club.

Figure 7.15

The event's promotional literature was outwardly feminist in principle by featuring anti-diet culture rhetoric.

Source: Anti Diet Riot Fest (2020)

Young started the Anti Diet Riot Club with a view to spread the SOC from #BodyPositive online spaces to offline domains. In her words, the idea was to take body positivity 'from the internet to in-the-flesh meetings' in a 'human-to-human way, rather than as keyboard warriors' (Young quoted in Dening,

2018). Moreover, during 2019, she raised £16,270, via crowdfunding, to build an Anti Diet Riot Bus, which will tour fifteen UK cities, educating communities on body acceptance issues. In our offline domains, women tend to only form crowds with regards to sharing weight struggles when they are orchestrated by diet industry conglomerates, such as Slimming World or Weight Watchers groups (Moseley, 2019). Young told *The Evening Standard* in 2019: 'Those support groups had a sense of community and shared experience that was nourishing in a way and I wanted to recreate that space, but for the exact opposite purpose' (Young quoted in Hampson, 2019).

I selected the Anti Diet Riot Fest for analysis on the basis that it was one of only a few high-profile physical British body positive events taking place and I had to attend a centralised London location to do so. Having heard Young's ambitious mission being articulated in the press, I wanted to observe whether these aspirations had translated into reality and successfully bridged the body positive gap between networked and physical community occupation. By attending this flagship 'mini-festival' offering talks and workshops, I noted that Young had fulfilled her aim to create spaces of offline camaraderie about weight issues, without the emphasis being maintained on corporate slimming incentives.

I witnessed online body positivity being translated into urban locations, but behind the doors of community hubs, as opposed to maintaining a mass street presence. A protest art making workshop was unfolding in the foyer, plus I was granted the opportunity to freely converse with attending BPM Instagrammers, such as Michelle Elman (@scarrednotscared) in organised offline activist spaces (See Fig. 7.16). Furthermore, I was not alone in this regard. Survey respondents later confirmed they were also in attendance on that day. This offers additional evidence of online-offline overlap, as networked relationships were found to be supplemented by physical face-to-face exchanges:

I run a body positive / body confidence retreat ever summer. I have spoken at anti diet riot club. I have a body positive related podcast.

(Harper, 36, white, female, Britain)

Leading academics, such as Professor Heather Widdows, joined panels alongside social media influencers to critically debate lookism, identity politics and appearance issues. This was a politics unravelling in more private, yet still accessible, spaces. Whereas Castells persisted to prioritise urban landscapes - for example, deeming historic town squares essential protest arenas to make demands - the BPM were meeting in a Hoxton Square nightclub to make a difference. As mentioned earlier (Taylor, 2016), publicly embodying a fat female protest identity can prove an intimidating experience, meaning that when women have historically adopted a 'fat activist sensibility' the formation of 'safe spaces' is prioritised (Cooper, 1998, p.164).

Figure 7.16

Left: A piece of protest artwork produced by a workshop attendee.

Right: A fangirl selfie taken with Michelle Elman, BPM activist and published author.

Source: Author's Own Fieldwork Photography (2020)

The first session I attended that day was entitled, *Kickstart Your Activism*, and led by another Instagrammer, Gem Kennedy (@thegemkennedy). The title made the session's protest incentives clear (See Fig. 7.17). In the immediate aftermath of the event, I reflected the following in my field notes:

I entered a small room with four white walls, in which a circle of patrons was sat on chairs, closed-eyes and meditating. After this, from our circle, we faced a large piece of paper placed on the floor and a woman volunteered to be drawn around with felt tip pens. I was

one of approximately five volunteers who worked collaboratively to draw around her body shape on to the paper. I contributed her pelvic and inner arm section in red ink. We were instructed to discuss with the person next to us the issues we feel particularly strongly about in our activism and write them on to the post-it notes provided. These chosen concerns were then placed on to the drawn-out body shape below. Injustices, such as racism, were placed on the foot because of the urge to kick it out. Diet culture seemed to be a recurring preoccupation cluttering up the abdomen.

This felt like feminism. We were women, occupying a safe physical space, sharing our stories of struggle. We actively listened to each other over a period of fifty minutes. There were about sixteen attendees in total. It reminded me of every description of second-wave feminist consciousness-raising I had ever encountered. Each voice was given the opportunity to articulate for three minutes what they prioritised to be their main activist concern at that moment. Activism was at the centre of the session, as we shared what our perceived barriers to social change generation were.

Many attendees engaged in critical group reflective practice and strategising by considering life obstacles that stop them from realising their social justice ambitions. These consisted of a lack of reliable and affordable childcare provision, money, plus fear of losing a professional job from participating in visible direct action. My frontline observation data therefore reiterates the importance of remembering that just because feminist protest may not achieve heightened street visibility, does not mean political activism and agency is not unfolding in quieter but effective ways.

The BPM was found to inhabit an active offline activist identity, yet one which was radically reimagined, when considered in conjunction with traditionalist masculine definitions of 'protest.' Alternately, within the context of feminist protest, consciousness-raising signifies a lynchpin of social action. In addition, it is a means of collective organisation fat activism has formerly absorbed into its repertoire of action. Allyson Mitchell from 1990s fat feminist performance troop, PPPO, highlights this cross-correlation:

> It was consciousness-raising among ourselves for us all to be there. It was this borrowing from that feminist power in numbers, feeding off each other's affirmations and then trying to bleed that out to the crowd (Mitchell quoted in Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p.949).

The next section advances analysis to consider unexpected findings regarding those populations who do not comply with Castells' definition of 'social movement' activity because hashtivism may be the only option available to them.
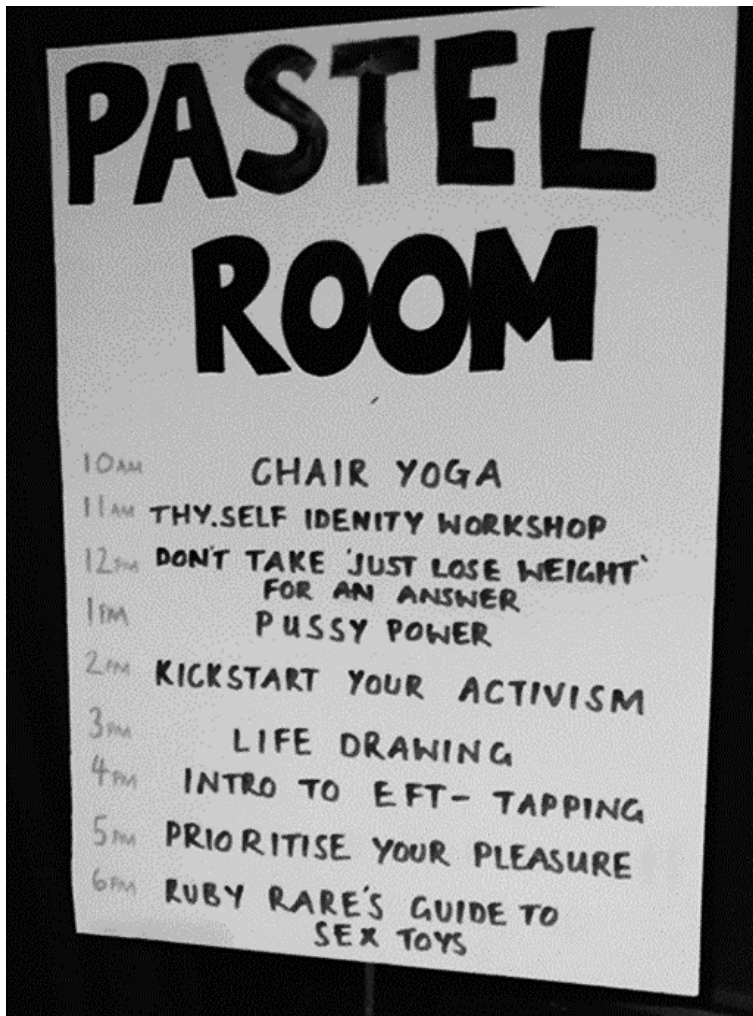
Figure 7.17

An image taken of a poster displayed in the lobby of Colours nightclub, Hoxton enlisting the schedule of body positive sessions on offer at Anti Diet Riot Fest.

Source: Author's Own Fieldwork Photography (2020)

Engaging with Armchair Activists

As discussed in Chapter Two, hashtag activism has been rigorously critiqued in existing literature for signifying a low risk and non-committal inferior form of 'weak tie' activism (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). My project fills a knowledge gap by granting hashtivists the opportunity to expressively contextualise their digital action, while distinguishing if it coexists with direct action. This line of critical dialogue warranted interrogation since claims had been made that so-called 'slacktivism' signalled the demise of 'real' activism.

A leading objective is vested in comprehending whether online 'connective' action overlaps with offline 'collective' action. This was developed in correspondence with SNT. In Chapter Two, Manuel Castells (2013) implored that virtual action could only attain formal 'social movement status' if it accommodated physical protest proponents. Slavina & Brym (2019, p.1) stress that Castells tends to portray hashtagging as a 'significant predicator to protest,' rather than regarding hashtagging an act of standalone protest. My data exposes the consequent deficits in understanding.

Notions of agency often emphasise the possession of personal choice, but the 'choice' to demonstrate offline is not available to everybody:

> *Being disabled, my main activist work is being done on Instagram. I can reach people all over the world with my words and my photos and my opinions…*
>
> *For those of us who are disabled, poor and/or live in rural areas, then "armchair activism" is often our only choice.*

> (Gwen, 32, white, female, 4WF, Europe)

Many survey submissions indicated that digital exchanges were not understood to be a precursory gateway to 'proper' protest, instead they signify the primary means of political expression. A positioning that was the result of competing sets of personal circumstances, which will be explored in the following sections.

When questioned, the majority (n=268, 54.9%) of BPM members confirmed that involvement in hashtagging networks had allowed them to overcome offline barriers to protest participation (See Fig. 7.18). My dataset contained several detailed rationales documenting why the online and the offline can fail to intersect during political protest. These findings confirm claims from Chapter Two (Chastain, 2020), that the prioritisation of 'in person' activism can be ableist and classist. Margaret is a feminist who first discovered the BPM during the early 2000s and sees the internet as a long-term lifeline to maintaining her fat political identity:

> *I don't live in a big city with events, rallies or feminist groups. I live in a small island. This movement gave me friends and allies all over the*

> *world and I was able to be interviewed by newspapers and media,*
> *organize events and travel and being a part of the movement.*

(Margaret, white, female, 4WF, Europe)

My research advocates that physical protest is an unachievable option for many activists who cannot form a crowd in their immediate locality.

Fig. 7.18

Has your involvement in body positive hashtagging allowed you to overcome any offline barriers to protest participation?

Yes — 268 (54.9%)

No — 220 (45.1%)
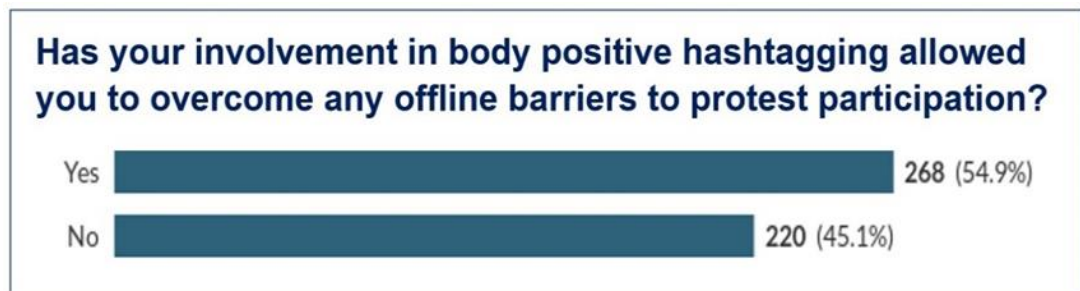
Angelica is another Instagrammer who feels connective action offers a solution to smalltown alienation for aspiring activists:

> *I live in small country and even smaller town Panevėžys…*
> *Instagram is the only place where I can find like-minded people.*

(Angelica, 28, white, female, Lithuania)

Qualitative accounts describe the lack of availability, or access, to BPM protest opportunities in immediate localities. Castells (2015, p.175) acknowledges the capacity of SNSs to 'build a real-time network of communication overlaid on the occupied space,' yet fails to appreciate digitally occupied spaces themselves as protest sites. Conversely, respondents express that a state of political isolation or ignorance can be overcome through virtual activism.

Research participants praised SNSs for providing a portal to open and expanded activist exchange. A dominant theme was this idea that hashtag communities were perceived to be more politically attuned than those Instagrammers physically inhabited. When asked, a strong majority (88.2%, n=441) of hashtaggers indicated that Instagram enabled connectivity to be achieved with like-minded BPM members across global borders (See Fig.

7.19). Instagram was found to aid global political activism, which would otherwise have languished on a local scale. Far from posing a slacktivist hinderance to social change, online protest allowed activists to find their people and locate distanced dissenting crowds. Respondents overcame offline limitations by exploiting online connectivity:

> *I find it easier to post how I'm feeling as I find people who follow me are like-minded and generally understand me more than my friends and family do…*
>
> *if only I had seen women loving themselves in a body like mine when I was younger, it might have meant I didn't have to deal with an eating disorder that consumed most of my life, and if by posting my body helps someone, then it's what we need.*
>
> (Bella, 27, white, female, Britain)

Survey data depicts how the hashtag can empower Instagrammers by fostering multinational networked peer groups away from closedminded localised cultures. Instagram granted users an alternative to despondent immediate physical vicinities, which otherwise left some feeling detachment from their cause.

Fig. 7.19

Has Instagram enabled you to connect with like-minded members of the body positive movement across global borders?

Yes	441 (88.2%)
No	22 (4.4%)
Don't Know	37 (7.4%)

In Chapter One, I noted how my research aim was developed in accordance with Bennett & Segerberg's (2012) claim that SMT has experienced a shift from collective to connective action. This research makes an evidence-based contribution to this discussion. My dataset suggests that rather than being responsible for the purported 'demise' of collective activism, SNSs can provide a springboard to offline activity. Survey testimonies document that

collective and connective methods regularly coexist as part of dual mobilisation strategies:

> *I have met like-minded people that I would never have otherwise met…*

> *I have attended events with plus size clothing brands, I have been on national television to showcase beach body confidence as a plus size woman, and I have modeled for a plus size clothing brand in their magazine.*

> (Harriet, 28, white, female, Britain)

In Chapter Two, Chen, et al. (2018) suggested hashtagging often encouraged internet users to develop a greater offline activist identity and my data supported this.

Fig. 7.20

Do you think Instagram offers a less risky alternative to offline activism?

Yes	318 (64.8%)
No	61 (12.4%)
Don't Know	112 (22.8%)
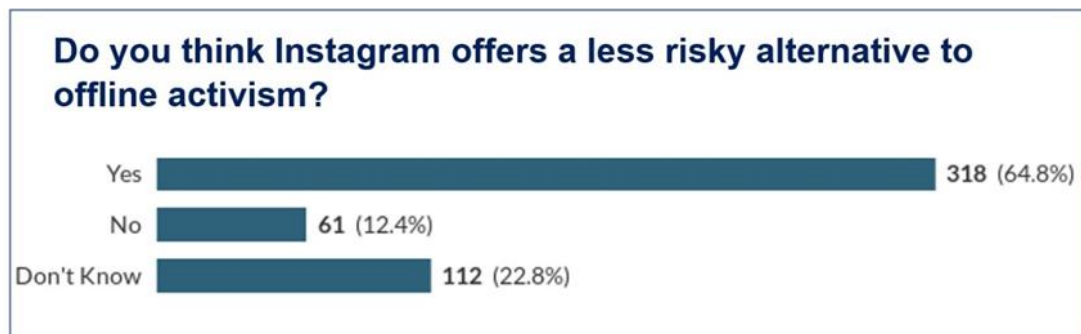
Unlike other movements, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), which have originated as hashtags and translated into mass offline street demonstrations, it would be an extremely brave, yet vulnerable and high-risk, act for dispersed small numbers of partially-dressed fat women to take to the streets. Survey respondents remind:

> *Fat people are discriminated against in healthcare, in jobs and suffer verbal abuse.*

> (Ffion, 32, white, female, Britain)

When surveyed, a majority (64.8%, n=318) of hashtaggers declared that Instagram offered them a 'less risky alternative' to offline activism (See Fig. 7.20). The illusion of choice, between collective and connective action, signifies a key flaw in Castells' theory. Earlier findings disclosed in Chapter

Five explored how SNSs are far from idealistic democratic spaces, due to the structural interference posed through algorithmic bias. Nonetheless, survey feedback provides first-hand explanation as to why Instagram can pose a less perplexing prospect to some than direct action.

Justine runs a fat liberation group in her city and volunteers for the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). She relayed how after being brought up to believe 'women in larger bodies should cover up,' the act of public physical protest can prove challenging to marginalised groups:

> *It [hashtag feminism] has offered the empowerment and information needed to take action in real life. I believe referring to it as armchair activism is ableist anyway.*

(Justine, 24, white, female, 4WF, America)

Testimonies emphasise that across the ages, feminist theorists note that women have risen up through what is termed 'quiet activism' expressed often in a less formally mechanistic manner than hypermasculine constructs centred on petitioning parliaments (Maddison, 2013; Mendes, et al., 2019, p.35). As Takhar (2013, p.181) asserts, 'for some women, to claim a public space is a political act.' On many occasions, this gendered tendency towards quiet activism is a social outcome from the systemic curtailment of female political activism and agency in public spaces, confining female activism to private spaces. Women confided why screen-based protest can be preferable to street-based protest:

> *We are safe behind our keyboards, in our locked homes, with (possibly) hidden IP addresses. It does take away the physical aspect of activism. We are not lined in a street praying police accept our protests and do not harm us. We are not stabding on physical pedestals hoping passersby will not grab our asses as we protest. If the insults become too much, we can block or log off.*

(Paige, 26, white, female, 4WF, America)

There are correlations to be made with this provenance and the contemporary lived experiences of fat feminists making a difference offline in charitable, but less openly ceremonious displays.

Due to the longstanding sexist organisation of society, women's confinement to the domestic private sphere has been continually ensured by gendering public environments as masculine climates to assert 'spatial control' and deter participation through the threat of violence (Weaver, et al., 2013, p.187). During the 2011 Egyptian Arab Spring protest, the image of an unconscious 'girl in a blue bra' being dragged and stamped on by military symbolised the female body's status as 'a repository of disciplinary power' (Hafez, 2014, p.20; Takhar, 2016, p.xix). Comparatively, SNSs can provide a self-preservation measure, while maintaining a politically active stance:

> *Our physical body isn't being exposed to threat when you're behind a keyboard. Your whole identity can be kept a secret if you want it to be.*

(Madeleine, 29, white, female, 4WF, America)

Survey feedback reflected the extent to which the online regularly fills a void in the offline protest cycle. My data indicates that activists are generally not deciding to abandon offline collective action in favour of online connective action, as Bennett & Segerberg (2012) intimated during Chapter One. Instead, hashtivism is found to generate civic participation that may otherwise not exist on a grassroots level. I propose that collective action is not being replaced, whereby connective action poses an inferior substitute, but it is to be respected in its own right.

Those physically present on the coalface of protest do not reflect all members of the politically active public for a multitude of reasons. Jaime uses Instagram to conjointly campaign for disability acceptance and fat acceptance activism. Jaime is quick to point out that these populations are routinely subjected to abuse and discrimination, both, online and offline. Unfortunately, Jaime can account for this from lived experience. However, so-called armchair activism signified the lesser of the two evils because oppressors did not escalate to physical violence:

> *Many people cannot through lack of access to physical spaces participate in irl protests. Armchair-Activism is highly important as a way for people to connect…*

> *I have been featured on a Sub Reddit[15] where strangers attack my appearance, sexuality, gender expression and speculate on the validity of my Disability…*
>
> *Nobody hits you on the Internet.*

(Jaime, 21, white, genderqueer/non-binary, 4WF, Britain)

Masculine social movement theorisations assert a narrow interpretation of articulating political unrest to the exclusion of effective alternative protest logics. By applying a yardstick of 'authenticity' that revers physical protest, Castells overlooks how urban occupation is unsuitable and not upheld as a quintessential archetype of protest by all activists.

Survey data conveyed that offline activism could prove intimidating to POC, due to the way that both, mental health issues and racial identity can intersect with protest identity. Hashtagging was found to help free nonheteronormative bodies from constrictive classifications of what 'counts' as activism:

> *I have social anxiety and think protests/marches are useless, so sometimes #feminism makes me feel like I am making a real difference…*
>
> *protesting is unsafe for me because I'm Black and white people like to have police at protests because they feel "safer."*

(Andie, 30, African, non-binary, America)

These observations also add to attempts to amplify the 'invisible struggle' POC and members from the transgender community experience through overaggressive policing (Jacobs, 2017, p.52). Castells (2013, p.xlvi) recognises that social movements 'usually stem from a crisis of living conditions that makes everyday life unbearable,' while disregarding how these same oppressive conditions can present a barrier to citizens engaging in offline demonstration. For those marginalised and silenced by the power relations associated with participation in physical protest, online and offline behaviours may never truthfully overlap.

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[15] A 'Sub Reddit' refers to a user-generated discussion thread on the Reddit platform.

Opportunities to express offline political activism and agency are not only routinely denied due to fear of fatphobic street harassment and police coercion, as class was also found to play a key mitigating role. For instance, Instagrammers believe hashtag feminism is inclusively progressive because:

You don't have to be able bodied/afford travel costs to join in online.

(Rosalie, 29, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

A common criticism of Castells' frameworks resides with a failure to apply his theorisations to frontline fieldwork, as opposed to commentating on unfolding uprisings from afar (Anttiroiko, 2015, p.12). My research divergently establishes close contact with live protest, both, online and offline. It generates an empirical evidence base to support critical dialogue regarding the future direction of social movements in the screen society. The BPM presents a current campaign case study. It was only through obtaining primary testimonies directly from BPM protestors, that I came to truly understand Castells' (2013) perceived harmonisation between online-offline realms to be logistically naïve in practice.

Survey data generated qualitative insight as to why Castells' theory may not cleanly translate into the complicatedness of lived protest realities:

Living in a rural area, there are no opportunities for me to do offline activism near where I live. Attending events in London is expensive and time consuming, so I do what I can to support people to attend these, and also provide a safe online place to bolster fat women's confidence…

(Rita, 48, white, female, 4WF, Britain)

These survey sentiments are supported by data derived from my accompanying participant observation study. When attending the London-based Anti Diet Riot Fest event, the realities of trying to attend physical protest events concentrated in capital city locations soon became clear. I started encountering the difficulties described by survey respondents based in rural settings. That wintery Sunday morning, my train was delayed by several hours due to ice on the tracks making me arrive late.

In addition, later that afternoon, while waiting for one of the talks to commence, a woman hurriedly took the seat next to me at the last minute. We got into discussion, and she explained how it had taken her eight hours to arrive from Cornwall. That day, both of us had invested vast time and expense to attend because the community spread of major BPM protest events was limited to metropolitan locales. These obstacles to physical protest encountered during fourth-wave feminist organising are nothing new. In contextualising Scottish WLM activity, Browne (2014, p.1) criticises 'British' accounts characterising a 'movement of the metropolis' when women travelled substantial distances to overcome a London-centric orientation. Nonetheless, Browne (2014, p.102) concedes overemphasis on 'big city' events meant that 'the anger about this domination seemed to increase the further a woman was located from London.'

Fig. 7.21

Instagram has been described as the 'feminine platform' because of its large active female usership. Does Instagram serve as a site of solidarity with other women for you?

Yes	351 (71.2%)
No	68 (13.8%)
Don't Know	74 (15%)
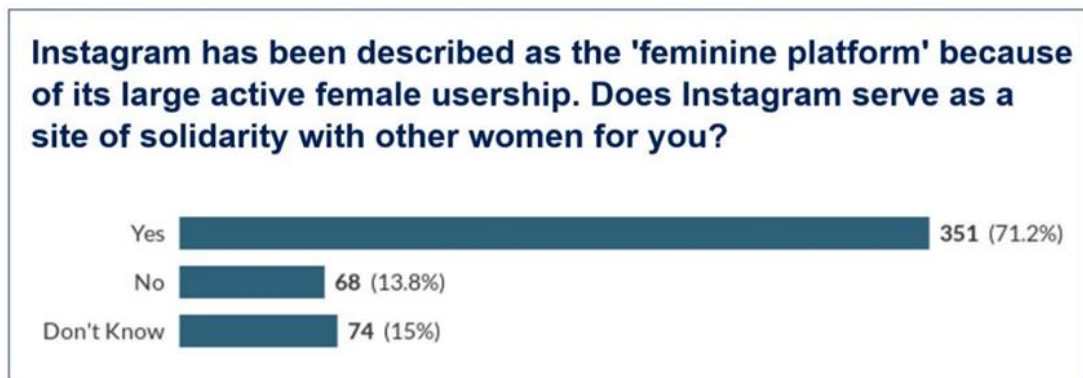
I propose that reliance on hashtag activism does not necessarily reflect a state of 'slacktivism,' but can instead be the outcome of a lack of geographically accessible and financially viable offline opportunity. These discrepancies in opportunity are only compounded when feminists relocate from capital cities:

> *I attend fat-lib and body-pos conferences, shows and events when they surface. This was easier to do back in NY [New York], where there is more of an IRL community for it.*

> (Sonia, 29, mixed-race, female, 4WF, Europe)

Most practising BPM protestors (71.2%, n=351) agreed that Instagram served as a 'site of solidarity with other women' (See Fig. 7.21). SNSs were

found to help foster peer-to-peer connections that could be difficult to establish in physical communities:

> *I'm disabled so my barriers to offline protests can't be fixed by online activism, but online gives me the place where I can still engage in activism. Instagram has been an accessibility measure for me in that sense.*
>
> (Kendall, 23, mixed-race, non-binary, 4WF, America)

Survey data drew attention to the fact that to glorify urban occupation as the 'correct' way of performing activism, is to do so at the expense of excluding the less able-bodied.

People in possession of the privileges of time, money, mobility and a centralised base could mobilise Castells' theory into a protest reality. I argue that possession of an online-offline dual identity should not be universally assumed. During their social media research into anti-rape culture digital feminist activism, Mendes, et al. (2019, p.106) similarly found SNSs to be facilitators of political connectivity. Their study was nevertheless limited in its analytic scope, which only incorporated more established SNSs such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr to the omission of Instagram. The qualitative responses, provided by disabled BPM Instagrammers above, continue this important conversation in relation to emerging new media. My data not only supports their conclusion, but progresses discussion, as Instagram was mutually found to play a valuable role fostering digital inclusion and expanding the boundaries to participation in feminist debate.

Conclusion

This chapter draws the presentation of my findings to a close. My research objectives steered analysis towards the pinpointing of political inclinations and offline protest activity, with a view to consider if the BPM could be classified as a 'social movement.' Critical discussion was devoted to situating the BPM within the activism versus slacktivism debate. Qualitative responses from the dataset showed that the majority of BPM hashtaggers considered themselves to be part of a 'social movement.' Furthermore, my

data supported the BPM's status as a 'social movement,' once collective attitudes and behaviours gathered through surveying were found to comply with Melucci's (1989) qualifying criteria. An empirical case has been made to suggest that social media activity can be reliably conceptualised as 'social movement' activity.

Chapter Seven has explored through a SMT framework how protest spaces are traditionally made, while applying a critical feminist lens to investigate how these spaces are remade by dissenting women to accommodate their advocation needs. Within patriarchal societies, not constructed with a woman's needs in mind, feminists have had to be resilient and resourceful in finding ways to make themselves heard. This thesis follows on from existing feminist inclinations (Takhar, 2013, p.5) towards detaching definitions of 'political agency' from established associations with political parties and trade unions to seek it out in alternative spaces. In the study of third-wave feminism, Buchanan (2018, p.14) deemed Riot Grrrl zinesters responsible for 'writing a riot' because their literary output built social justice spaces of feminist consciousness. Throughout this chapter my findings advance this discussion. I propose that fourth-wave feminists are similarly 'photographing a riot' by community building, via a substantially shared outlook and set of subversive imaging rituals.

My dataset delivers a strong set of experiential narratives. It is through these words, obtained directly from hashtag feminists, that derogatory discourses seeking to diminish hashtag feminism as 'slacktivism' are challenged. The extensive documentation of BPM activity through first-hand passages responds to pleas from feminist scholars (Licona, 2005) to reclaim female protest histories by centring self-publication solutions that would otherwise be ignored. Previous chapters explored a wealth of existing literature quick to dismiss hashtag activists as being too lazy. In contrast, my study generates fresh insight by counterposing that mobilisation strategies often remain screen-based because women are too poor, isolated or intimidated to engage offline. I highlight how fat feminists are not merely driven by taking up space, but seeking out safe spaces, as gendered subordination is fortified

through public ridicule of both their bodies and preferred modes of claims-making. The next chapter concludes this project by contextualising key findings and making recommendations for future research.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

According to Fairbank (2017, np) a contemporary trend towards 'pop feminism' means that feminist activism has become more about 'aesthetics than ideas.' A newfound protest emphasis on visibility stands accused of 'projecting images of feminist action rather than taking feminist action' (Edwards, 2021, np). I acknowledge the significant impact the BPM has had on the feminist movement by challenging that images are a form of political action. My work repositions fourth-wave image events within serious social movement theorical debate as visual stands against sexist stigmatisation.

The main achievement of this research is establishing that hashtag activity can be conceptualised as political social movement activity. Classical social movement theorists have spent decades talking over protesting women and delineating hegemonic terms of political engagement. In more recent years, postfeminist theorists have talked down to women by imposing regulatory expectations of 'appropriate' political conduct. I wished to put an end to the hostile and habitual subordination reserved for the activist practices of female resistance. Body positivity warranted inclusion within present-day understanding of social movements because the information age has introduced a host of screen-based mobilisation strategies.

In testament to the feminist slogan, 'my body, my choice' I make an important intervention by going straight to the source of the action. The time has come to stop casting doubt and to start shedding light on emerging photographic protest behaviours. The critical interrogation of Instagrammers granted visual feminists the chance to not only be seen but heard. As a feminist researcher, it was essential to push past outside aspersions labelling exhibitionist empowerment as pointless and pornographic, to take academic debate to the next level. Women no longer simply put their bikinis on to go to the beach, they signal a protest uniform for some, and SMT needs to shift its focus accordingly. The research objectives were:

- To investigate whether #BodyPositive hashtaggers consider themselves 'political' and whether this online 'connective' action overlaps with offline 'collective' action, in accordance with SNT.

- To survey Instagrammers to find out if visual mobilisation strategies are regarded as acts of 'empowering exhibitionism' (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017; Koskela, 2004), in response to feminist concerns regarding aesthetical fixation and objectification.

- To develop an intersectional understanding of the BPM through charting the distribution of political activism and agency by building a participant profile.

- To analyse how hashtag feminism is challenging SMT conventions.

This thesis provides an empirical assessment of female embodied resistance removed from the bureaucratic structures resigned to its belittlement. I treat both, female Instagrammers, and their digital strategies, with the dignity they deserve by positioning them within an ongoing critical cycle of fat feminist struggle. A key argument rests with its mission to talk to, as opposed to talk down to, women on the web who are protesting through pictures. It achieves this by adopting feminist research techniques that uphold the preservation of activist voice. Women have been talked over for centuries; I did not want to contribute to this legacy towards presumed gendered passivity by merely picking apart body parts from photographs under the auspice of progressive political analysis. Instagram is a cultural space, nonetheless, Instagrammers are not cultural objects.

Through a significant dataset of frontline testimonies, I argue that image events allow opportunities for micro level political discord. Postfeminist critique is particularly damning about tendencies towards LYB discourse. I provide an evidence-supported counternarrative highlighting the emancipatory and empowering possibilities of user-generated photography.

Within the context of feminist protest history, BPM members are not publicly exhibiting their bodies on poles or beauty pageant podiums to await heteromale validation. My work's efficacy is orientated in a determination to stop commentating and start communicating with those directly responsible for connective action. This approach allows me to demonstrate the multifaceted composition of female political activism and agency. I assert that media is not produced to be offensive by endorsing a male sense of entitlement, it is an offensive against scripts of male entitlement.

These findings are synonymous with earlier observations that women's social movement organisations (SMOs) have a long tradition of mobilising 'expressive forms of action' situated 'in the sphere of culture and cultural production' to transform societal consciousness (Connolly, 2006, p.65). User-generated images act as carriers to convey a subjectivity resolute on defying gendered stereotypes. By rejecting centuries of weight stigma and body policing, BPM selfies are not an exercise in sex work, they are the products of activist labour. Image production is presented as a protest 'tactic' to obtain positive public visibility. In the same way LGBT+ social movements have campaigned to get 'out of the closet, into the streets' (Johansson, 2020, p.117) and disability activists demand, 'nothing about us without us' (Charlton, 2000). Fat women are making themselves seen within a visual climate determined to delete, decry and dehumanise their identity.

Furthermore, my findings contend that although the BPM maintains a low-key street protest presence, this should not be misinterpreted to mean offline 'activism' is entirely absent. Connolly (2002, p.90) championed charities such as Rape Crisis for providing a 'broader base' for the WLM to maintain urban occupation via informal care channels. Banyard (2010, p.214) observes of 'frontline' feminist interactions: 'Taking part in collective grassroots feminism is also about more than just achieving campaign goals. It can have a much more personal impact.' This project has uncovered a wealth of face-to-face outreach efforts endeavoured by hashtag feminists to counsel, clothe and educate within physical communities. Connolly (1999, pp.145-146) argues that 'extensive political space' is occupied by women in

'civil society' through female-concentrated spaces outside 'macho style' interpretations of protest. My survey and participant observation data substantiate this claim. Behind the doors of book groups, classrooms, eating disorder clinics and conference spaces - I found fat feminism taking up space.

The Future of Researching Feminist Activism

This thesis attests to the prominent role visual media plays in feminist protest. Image production is resituated from being seen as a side project of women's liberation activism (e.g., banner making) to signifying the very substance of resistance (e.g., selfies, memes). I have tracked the trajectory of gendered fat oppression and associated feminist responses across the decades, future social media studies should continue to trace digital developments impacting the habits of dissenting feminists.

During analysis, hashtaggers recounted Instagram was one SNS in a longevity of platforms occupied as part of the BPM. For many survey respondents, their body positive journey began on MySpace or Tumblr years before. Technology is transient and consequently, if fourth-wave feminists are utilising SNSs as protest sites, they are occupying shaky ground. Technological innovation means that platform preferences can be fickle and prone to fad because they are part of a constantly replenishing mediascape. Considering this, recent uptake in video-sharing applications, such as TikTok, warrants further sociological investigation to gauge protest propensity. A recommendation issued after survey participants suggested their Instagram profiles were being demoted to a dumping ground simply to share links to videos from their TikTok accounts. It is important to recognise the future role moving images will play in the BPM.

This is not to say Instagram no longer poses an area of interest for fat feminist scholarship. On the contrary, I encourage future studies to build on my findings. My survey data collection was closed after a fortnight because I was inundated with responses. There is scope for additional investigation on

a larger scale with a more substantial team and resources.

Furthermore, the Instagram platform should maintain its status as a focal point for feminist critique following this project's findings concerning algorithmic discrimination. My anecdotal evidence brings renewed emphasis to issues documented in earlier Instagram scholarship (Caldeira, et al., 2018a) regarding how the application's content moderation practices pose an impediment to feminist engagement. This thesis proposes that social change needs to occur in social media regulations given the user accounts of prejudicial censorship my research has uncovered. In Chapter Three, I explored how Costanza-Chock (2020, p.54) previously called for 'design justice' to reform technological structures of biased prohibition enforced by platform proprietors. I add momentum to such advocacy by providing this up-to-date assessment documenting the blocking and banning encountered by marginalised userships, with the view to invoke policy revaluation in this area. Instagram's authoritative guidelines were found to impose a ceiling height upon what representative 'freedoms' can ultimately be achieved by women on the web. Hashtaggers contend with the fact that their online coverage can be swiftly withdrawn, in accordance with the size of their waistband, or the colour of their skin. The prevalence of algorithmic body policing warrants further attention, not only within the realm of future feminist study, but from within the social media organisations themselves. I implore Instagram policymakers and platform developers to start taking practical steps to ensure that their application helps build activist communities and stops tearing them down.

Many facets of fourth-wave identity politics have been discussed across preceding chapters. Unfortunately, a wider analysis incorporating all axes of identity was beyond the scope of this single study. I recognise that not all feminists are online. One shortcoming of sourcing research samples directly from SNSs, is that investigation fails to encompass those without internet access. A lot of contemporary feminist studies focus on what have been termed the 'digital haves,' future studies are recommended that incorporate the 'digital have-nots' to engage more with why white feminism continues to

dominate fourth-wave manifestations (Raveesh, 2013, p.1753). Although my online survey data was supported by participation observation fieldwork undertaken at offline events, new research could devote greater focus to how body positivity is performed in physical spaces. This recommendation is made on the basis that, due to digital inequity, the most stigmatised body types may never get the opportunity to log on and be positive about their bodies. Moreover, my dataset presented an eclectic array of offline behaviours, which warrant additional investigation to further broaden collective ideas surrounding political engagement.

Conclusion

Through the incorporation of SMT, this research finds that #BodyPositive social media output can be reliably classified as 'social movement' action. When approached through a feminist framework, the digital and the domestic activity of hundreds of women can be rightfully conceptualised as activism. In doing so, my work prevents the erasure fat feminist activists have experienced not only in wider society, but from within the feminist movement itself. Fat is firmly established to be a fourth-wave feminist issue. I argue that female digital consumption is about so much more than victim typologies founded on body discipline, dissatisfaction, and dysmorphia. An important intervention is made by asserting that Instagram is not solely a site of identity crisis, it is a protest site for identity politics.

As Ringrose & Eriksson Barajas (2011, p.121) proclaimed in the early days of Bebo interactions, SNSs are 'sites of both gendered risk and opportunity.' My study helps deliver some balance to feminist debate in drawing attention to the spirited solidarity against sizeism and structures of borderless camaraderie existent within Instagram hashtags. BPM Instagrammers are breaking new frontiers by 'watching their weight' through photographic displays of disobedience, as opposed to in the tireless pursuit of feminine 'perfection.' I propose that fourth-wave hashtagging has picked up where third-wave zine photocopying left off, as an activist arc of fat feminist resistance continues to be fought through citizen media.

It was important as a feminist social historian to provide a visual retrospective account of fat female representation. Critical discussion has been informed by a combination of archive objects and contemporary digital resources, which were compared to demonstrate the social gains made through social media usage. Across time, fat women have been culturally conditioned to hate their thunder thighs, muffin tops, cankles, middle-age spread and bingo wings. The approach to analytically contrast old and new media artefacts was taken in order that Instagram's potential to semiotically liberate fat identity from these stigmatising associations could be visualised. Textual analysis of supporting images has helped reinforce key arguments. For instance, the systemic shaming encountered by fat populations is powerfully purveyed via historic anti-fat advertising imagery. While real-life Instagram self-portraits were integrated to provide important visual aids for those unfamiliar with the platform's trademark 'optics' such as swimsuit selfies and memes. All illustrative examples ultimately served to expand knowledge about mercurial feminist protest habits, plus increase awareness of pioneering photographic advocacy conventions.

This project succeeds in highlighting that fat women are not only at war with themselves, they can also be BoPo Warriors, wielding the weapons of hashtags and image production to challenge their stigmatised social position. Fourth-wave feminists neither wish to mimic masculine versions of protest, or fat femininity. A disservice is done to fat feminist identity when dominant discourse portrays female fatness through 'good fatty' stereotypes consumed by calorie counting (Gibson, 2021, np). A strong case is presented to suggest that fat female embodiment can also be characterised through a radically creative feminist counterculture. My research demands a change in narrative by amplifying first-hand activist narratives throughout. The pictures women take of their bodies do not always evidence a tendency towards 'playing up to the patriarchy.' Through rigorous empirical debate, I shed new light on self-portraiture as a gateway to critical feminist identity formation. Hegemonic notions of protest may have been made in man's image many years before the advent of social media. However, I take definitions of protest from the town square to Instagram squares, to draw focus to

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imaging's fundamental role in contemporary claims of female political activism and agency.

Throughout this thesis, I unveil the lesser documented facet of Instagram, an application so readily associated with filters and plasticity, by evidencing agentic user motives of feminist reclamation and retaliation. Nevertheless, the relationship between Instagram and women's bodies remains incredibly complex, as my study has demonstrated. This has resulted in identifying the pitfalls when commandeering SNSs to diversify body representation. Patriarchal power relations perpetuate exclusion through endorsing 'traditional' forms of protest. I adopt a cautionary tone in underlining that fourth-wave feminism risks doing the same by necessitating nudity as a prerequisite to participation in debate.

Feminist notions of political agency are frequently premised on autonomous choice and control. While my work validates the status of virtual body performance as 'protest,' it additionally raises awareness of the barriers posed to independent feminist action online. These come in the form of co-optation and racial algorithmic discrimination. With support from historical documents, I have illustrated how the bodies and protest concerns of BWOC have been stigmatised and overlooked within the feminist movement and wider society. Unfortunately, SNSs were shown to offer no safe haven in this regard and failed to deliver the activist freedoms prophesised by techno-optimists. My assessment calls into question Instagram's suitability as a vehicle for intersectional re-representation given that user output is regulated in the interests of upholding whitewashed beauty standards.

This activist landscape is far from picture perfect as technological structures disproportionately monitor, target and silence users from marginalised groups. My evidence confirms Instagram's status as a protest site for the transmission of subversive fat visibility, yet importantly, it also recognises Instagram as a roadblock due to its discriminative censorship practices. Barbara Kruger's 1989 activist artwork advocated: 'Your body is a battleground.' My findings illuminate, in conjunction with a thriving hashtag

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movement, how this regrettably continues to be the case. Women will withdraw focus from their bodies once patriarchal forces withhold from abusing and sexualising those bodies. For as long as male figures of authority keep instructing women what to do with their bodies, feminists will keep finding new ways to fight back and exert their political activism and agency.

Word Count: 81,030

Appendix A

London South Bank
University

Body Positive: Activism and Agency in our Screen Societies

Page 1: Welcome

You are invited to participate in an online survey investigating the rise of body positivity on Instagram. You have been selected to take part on the basis that you have used a body positive hashtag in a public post. By participating in this academic study, you will be helping to advance knowledge about this hashtag movement. Please feel free to pass the survey link on to fellow body positive hashtaggers from the virtual community. This survey is part of a research project being conducted by Sarah Merton, a PhD researcher at London South Bank University. It should take approximately 25-35 minutes to complete. You will be given a small series of basic questions to answer regarding your personal motivations behind these digital behaviours. **Please read through these terms before agreeing to participate below.**

TERMS & CONDITIONS

Before proceeding further, please note that this survey should **only be completed by those over the age of 18.** By submitting this survey, you are granting your electronic consent to take part in the study and confirming you are an adult.

Project Aim

The aim of this research is to explore how social media Instagram profiles and the body are utilised as potential sites of contemporary feminist protest, in relation to the advent of Body Positive virtual activism.

Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research by exiting the survey at any time without penalty by closing the browser.

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Data Processing Statement

As part of the project we will be recording personal data relating to you. This will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Under GDPR, the legal basis for processing your personal data will be public interest/the official authority of the University.

What happens to the data I provide?

Your answers will be completely anonymous, and we will use all reasonable endeavours to keep them confidential. Your data will be stored in a password-protected file. Your IP address will not be stored.

The research will be published in a final thesis to be held in London South Bank University's repository. This project has been ethically approved via the London South Bank University Ethics Panel.

Your Rights

You have the right to request to see a copy of the information we hold about you and to request corrections or deletions of the information that is no longer required.

You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time without giving reasons and without consequences to you. You also have the right to object to us processing relevant personal data however, please note that once the data are being analysed and/or results published it may not be possible to remove your data from the study.

Whom do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

If you would like to discuss the research with someone please contact the researcher, Sarah Merton: mertons@lsbu.ac.uk, or alternatively you can consult the Project Supervisor, Dr. Shaminder Takhar: takhars@lsbu.ac.uk.

You have the right to lodge a complaint against the University regarding data protection issues with the Information Commissioner's Office (https://ico.org.uk/concerns/). The University's Scholarly Communications & Repository Manager is Stephen Grace. If you have any questions relating to data protection these can be addressed to grace5@lsbu.ac.uk in the first instance.

The brief survey starts on the next page and I thank you for your participation in furthering our collective understanding of body positivity.

Page 2: Section 1 - Who Are You?

1. What was your age on your last birthday?
Please enter in numbers.   *Optional*

[   ]

2. Where do you live?
Please tick.   *Optional*

☐ North America   ☐ South America   ☐ Europe

☐ Africa   ☐ Asia   ☐ Australia

☐ Caribbean Islands   ☐ Pacific Islands   ☐ Other

2.a. If you selected Other, please specify: *Optional*

[   ]

3. How would you describe your ethnic origin?
Please tick.   *Optional*

○ White English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British

○ White Irish

○ White Gypsy or Irish Traveller

○ Any other White background

○ White and Black Caribbean

○ White and Black African

○ White and Asian

○ Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background

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○ Indian

○ Pakistani

○ Bangladeshi

○ Chinese

○ Any other Asian background

○ African

○ Caribbean

○ Any other Black / African / Caribbean background

○ Arab

○ Any other ethnic group

4. What gender do you identify as?
Please tick. *Optional*

○ Female

○ Male

○ Other

4.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

<div style="border:1px solid;width:50%;height:2em;"></div>

5. Is your gender the same as assigned at birth?
Please tick. *Optional*

○ Yes

○ No

6. Do you consider yourself to be:
Please tick.

○ Bisexual

○ Heterosexual or Straight

○ Homosexual

○ Prefer Not to Say

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Page 3: Section 2 - Your Body Positivity

7. How did you first get involved in the Body Positive movement?
Please explain.

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8. A large amount of literature suggests that body positivity has its origins in the Fat Acceptance Movement. Before posting a body positive hashtag, did you have any previous involvement with forms of Fat Acceptance activism?
Please tick.

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

☐ Yes

☐ No

8.a. If you answered yes and would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

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8.b. If you answered no, did the Instagram platform first introduce you to the Body Positive movement?

○ Yes

○ No

9. In relation to your own body positive hashtagging experience, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement...
Please tick.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Body positivity is: 'about accepting our bodies as they are, at any size, and challenging the oppressive systems that teach us we aren't allowed to do that' (Crabbe 2017, p.76).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. Do you consider the body positive movement to be a community?
Please tick.

○ Yes

○ No

10.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

11. Has Instagram enabled you to connect with like-minded members of the body

positive movement across global borders? *Please tick.*

C Yes

C No

C Don't Know

11.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 200 characters long.

12. Have you ever met any fellow body positive Instagrammers in real life? *Please tick.*

C Yes

C No

13. Aside from using body positive hashtags in public online spaces, do you currently participate in any offline body positive activities?
Please tick.

C Yes

C No

13.a. If you answered yes to the above question, please provide further details of additional events attended.

14. Do you use Instagram to share stories of struggle against narrow beauty standards with others? *Please tick.*

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

14.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

15. Which of the following statements best describes your Instagram use as a body positive hashtagger. *Please tick.*

- ○ I use Instagram as a tool to track my exercise and/or weight loss.
- ○ I use Instagram to reject diet culture.
- ○ I use Instagram but do not mention dieting, exercise and weight loss at all.
- ○ Other

15.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

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16. To help gain an understanding of the body positive movement's collective identity, which of these digital sharing practices have you participated in?
Please tick.

☐ Before-After Feature

☐ Bikini Selfie

☐ Generic Body Selfie

☐ Workout Selfie

☐ Food Images

☐ Memes

☐ Video Footage

☐ Other

16.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

17. Do you think Instagram gives you more control than mainstream media over how your body is represented? *Please tick.*

○ Yes

○ No

17.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

18. Research has critiqued the body positive movement for no longer representing diverse and intersectional voices. This has led to claims that those inhabiting marginalised and oppressed bodies are becoming further excluded. Do you feel represented in the body positive movement?
Please tick.

○ Yes

○ No

18.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

19. Do you think that exhibiting your body on social media can improve the lives of women?
Please tick.

☐ Yes

☐ No

19.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

20. A large percentage of body positive posts consist of selfies, which can contain high

levels of nudity. Do you think that social change can be achieved via this type of self-initiated nudity?
Please tick.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

20.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

21. Critics have called for body 'neutrality' instead of 'positivity' to limit women's objectification*. What are your views on the movement's 'bodily' focus? *Please detail your response below*.

➕ More info

22. In social media studies, trolling has been pinpointed as a common way of silencing women. Has online abuse, or a fear of online abuse, ever prevented you from posting something on Instagram?
Please tick.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

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22.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

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23. Have you ever had to disengage with digital culture by taking a 'mental health break' from Instagram? *Please tick.*

○ Yes

○ No

23.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

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24. Online hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo are often regarded as social movements. When using a body positive hashtag online, do you consider yourself to be a member of a social movement?
Please tick.

○ Yes

○ No

24.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

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25. By hashtagging, do you want to generate social change? *Please tick.*

○ Yes

○ No

○ Not Sure

25.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

26. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements...
Please tick.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Body positive hashtagging is a form of political resistance.	☐	☐	☐
My use of a body positive hashtag is a feminist act.	☐	☐	☐
The personal content I post on Instagram is political.	☐	☐	☐

I have used Instagram to call out against social injustice.	☐	☐	☐
Instagram provides me with a space to challenge oppressive body ideals.	☐	☐	☐
I believe that using a body positive hashtag can generate social change.	☐	☐	☐

27. By posting a body positive hashtag on the Instagram platform, do you consider yourself an activist?
Please tick.

○ Yes

○ No

27.a. If yes, how many hours a week of digital labour* do you devote to your hashtag activism? *Please select the amount that applies to your weekly usage.*

⊞ More info

○ 1 hour or under

○ 1 - 3 hours

○ 4 - 6 hours

○ 7 - 9 hours

○ 10 - 15 hours

○ 15 - 25 hours

○ Over 25 hours

28. Walker (2020) states that protest is 'founded on rebellion' and to be an 'activist' requires rejection of an existing world order. *Please provide a brief outline below of beauty standards you feel the body positive movement rejects, if any.*

Your answer should be no more than 200 characters long.

29. Social media has been credited for creating a 'call-out culture,' whereby online platforms offer the opportunity for women to speak out against oppression. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
Please tick.

○ Agree

○ Disagree

○ Don't Know

29.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

30. Have you ever started an online petition related to your body positive hashtagging activity? *Please tick.*

○ Yes

○ No

30.a. If you answered yes to the above question, please briefly outline the petition's cause.

Your answer should be no more than 100 characters long.

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31. Instagram has been described as the 'feminine platform' because of its large active female usership. Does Instagram serve as a site of solidarity with other women for you?
Please tick.

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

32. In 2013, Kira Cochrane announced the rise of a 'fourth wave of rebel women' enabled through the internet, where she says a feminist 'awakening' has occurred. Do you see your body positive social media activity as part of this alleged 'fourth wave' of feminism?
Please tick .

○ Yes

○ No

32.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

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33. Feminists have historically campaigned for women to 'reclaim space' because female fatness has been presented as problematic. In the course of your use, do you think that Instagram offers a space where the stigma surrounding fatness can be

overcome through fat celebration?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

33.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

34. Hashtag feminism has been disregarded as armchair activism or slacktivism. However, has your involvement in body positive hashtagging allowed you to overcome any offline barriers to protest participation? *Please tick.*

○ Yes

○ No

34.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

35. Research conducted by Mendes, Ringrose & Keller (2019) found that activists believe they can connect with other feminists in 'less risky' ways online than through offline forms of protest. Do you think Instagram offers a less risky alternative to offline activism? *Please tick.*

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

35.a. If you would like to add more, please do in the box provided below.

Your answer should be no more than 500 characters long.

36. In summary, please select the statement that most resonates with your personal body positive hashtagging experience. Instagram is... *Please tick.*

○ A place of business

○ A platform for socialisation

○ A protest site

○ A site of trolling and abuse

○ Other

36.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

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Page 4: Final Page

All complete!

Thank you for taking part in my study undertaken at the School of Law and Social Sciences at London South Bank University, to further academic understanding of the body positive movement.

The very first body positive hashtags began to circulate on Instagram circa 2012. Nevertheless, some years later, very little is still known about them. Today, you have helped redress this knowledge gap in the collective understanding of our screen societies.

Appendix B

Appendix C

Bodyposipanda's NEVER SAY DIET CLUB Live — WHAT NOW?

1. GET ANGRY - take all of the anger you've aimed towards your body over the years and put it where it really belongs. Fuck diet culture!

2. DIET CULTURE DETOX - cleanse your life from all the things that make you feel like your body isn't enough. Social media accounts, diet talk, books, magazines, TV shows, foods you hate, too-small clothes & bathroom scales.

3. SHOW YOUR BODY SOME KINDNESS - stop pulling, poking and grabbing the parts you don't like. Make time to sit with your body and relearn how those parts really feel, with kindness & care.

4. DO ONE THING - wear the bikini, go on the trip, tell them how you feel. You are worthy of full, vibrant and happy life in the body you have!

5. KEEP QUESTIONING - every body ideal, every diet ad, every fatphobic comment, question it all & recognise where it comes from.

What offline body positive activities are Instagrammers involved in?

Urban occupation featured on a small scale and included self-love demonstrations, Pride walks, marches, rallies and the Europe-wide Body Positive Catwalks project.

Therapy feat. heavily, such as recovery & support groups.

Charity work centred a lot on volunteering for the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA).

Empowering photo shoots were popular, especially 'boudoir' sessions.

Teaching dance and fitness encompassed fat fitness and plus size pilates classes, voguing and BoPo rock climbing.

Swimming activities consisted of: Aqua Porko, the Fat Babes Club of Columbus, nude swimming, pool parties and synchronised swimming for fatties.

Reading was featured in offline activity, where the consumption of fat liberation articles and self-love books were enlisted. This suggests internal individualist body positive action.

Media engagement consisted of zine production, book authorship, giving TV and radio interviews and columnists. Plus, a self-published colouring book about fat acceptance from Italy.

Making art feat. lots of bopo life drawing, plus embroidery and illustration.

Meet ups inc. book clubs, movie nights & plus size parties.

Legend:
- Anti Diet Riot Fest (2)
- BoPo Photo Shoots (16)
- Burlesque & Drag Events (5)
- Business (12)
- Charity Work (8)
- Clothes Swaps & Flea Markets (3)
- Conference Attendance (12)
- Cosplay & Conventions (2)
- Curve Fashion Shows (9)
- Events Organising (16)
- Dieticians, Life Coaches & Trainers (15)
- Fat Liberation Activist Group (1)
- Festival Attendance (1)
- Giving Lectures/Talks (20)
- Making Art (8)
- Media Engagement (17)
- Meet Ups (19)
- Mentoring (6)
- Panel Discussions (3)
- Plus Size Fashion & Modelling (14)
- Pumpkin Patch (1)
- Reading (5)
- Reproductive Justice Event (1)
- Retreats & Workshops (18)
- Swimming (6)
- Teaching dance & fitness (19)
- Therapy (16)
- Urban Occupation: Demonstrations, Marches, Rallies (5)
- Yoga (11)

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