“PUT TOGETHER”:
BLACK WOMEN’S BODY STORIES IN TORONTO, (AD)DRESSING IDENTITY AND THE THREADS THAT BIND

JILLIAN LAURA-LEE BIANCA ANDREW

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Education
York University
Toronto, ON

August 2018

ABSTRACT

"Put Together": Black Women's Body Stories in Toronto, (Ad)dressing Identity & The Threads That Bind centers child and adult body stories shared by eight Black women, including the author, 29 to 39 years of age living in Toronto – one of the most diverse cities in the world. Historically, the lived experiences and 'body talk' of Black women and girls have been routinely marginalized and tangentially documented within dominant monochromatic body image literature which usually centers the experience of white women and girls. The geography of the seven participants is intentional as it further destabilizes the Americentric lens of fat studies and Black feminist scholarship by adding to the canon the stories of Toronto-based women who self-identify with both blackness and fatness[1]: two embodiments often misperceived, misrepresented and constructed as excess(ive) in need of repair and regulation. Through a hybrid, intersectional framework, informed by tenets of fat studies, anti-racist, Black feminist thought, symbolic interactionism and sartorial scholarship this dissertation intends to demonstrate the socially constructed educational 'societal curriculum' – the everyday and systemic 'good body, bad body' lessons - learned through social interactions with significant and generalized others and through the symbolic and cultural currency of objects such as clothing and self-fashioning practices that help to shape how these participants think, feel and remember their bodies through the qualitative, unstructured interview. Their stories are thematically analyzed and the threads that bind and bound them are made apparent.

[1] I use the term fatness as a political term against mainstream, pathologizing terms such as "obese." It is important to note that while I use the term fat throughout the dissertation, some participants referred to themselves as "plus" "curvy" "large" "big" and other euphemisms. In quotes I use the specific words a participant has used. Generally speaking I will use the term fat or fatness.

Participants' accommodation and resistance of normalized body ideals and social forces are explored. Particular attention is paid to their material self-representation as impression management through dress since respectability politics and appearance factor significantly in their body stories along with various activisms that help them 'buck the system' through self-definition and valuation. Participants' raced, gendered, and sized body stories are shaped through their family, schooling, workplace, public space, intimate relationships, community activism and sartorial engagements among other key influencers and as *"Put Together…"* unfolds, their experiences with racism, sexism, class bias, fat phobia and other intersectional forms of body-based discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence, and the mental health implications of these embodied traumas are laid bare.

Traditionally, it is postulated that Black women have little worries about their weight, their bodies and are more welcoming of fatness. However, *"Put Together…"* demonstrates the falsehood of this essentializing assumption and addresses the paucity in the research. The "double whammy" of fatness and Blackness and the accompanying stereotypes set up a scenario where the Black women in this research are arguably engaged in a heightened awareness – a 'triple consciousness' of size, gender and race corporeality. This qualitative research can support educators, activists and policy pertaining to appearance-based discrimination, equity and inclusivity. It also supports the need for more inclusive sizing, good quality and affordably-priced clothing options for fat bodies. Body-based bullying, size discrimination and anti-Black racism are inextricably linked in this study. The outcome of that to future studies can be more comprehensive, culturally-relevant and size diverse research, images, analyses and conversations on body image which includes race and representation, in school curriculum, in workplace human rights, heath and wellness and in fashion industry policies and practice for instance.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to all my participants who were involved in this journey. I especially dedicate this to the participants featured in the dissertation: ‘Becky’, Steff, ‘Amina’, ‘Nana’, ‘Pat’, ‘Lexis’ and ‘Fancy’ – seven brilliant, courageous and generous Black women who selflessly shared their body stories with me. I could not have completed my journey without your voices. You gave me a priceless gift and I am forever thankful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without my patient, determined, brilliant and caring academic supervisor Dr. Karen Stanworth, this victory would not have been won. I cannot thank you enough Karen for your commitment to me and to my participants' body stories. During moments when I couldn't see myself, let alone the end of this journey, you remained steadfast and pushed me through reminding me of my intellectual worth and the significance of my academic contributions to my professional and community activisms. Thank you for your course Visual Culture & Sexualities/Gender and for our many pivotal conversations on the subversive power of the image. This is *our* victory!

My committee members, Drs. Allyson Mitchell and Chloë Brushwood Rose, your generous feedback over the years was invaluable to the scope and richness of my work. Allyson, as one of Toronto's first preeminent fat activists in the mid '90s your literary, arts and activist work helped me see the potential of politicized fatness and contributed to my burgeoning passions in this regard. Chloë, your work on representation, its intersections and storytelling also helped me think through my project in a meaningful and deeply reflexive way.

I was privileged to have Dr. Deborah McPhail and Dr. Debra Pepler's support and feedback as my external and internal respectively. Your contributions to fat studies, anti-bullying, healthy relationships and stigma continue to help push and reimagine boundaries in both theory and practice.

I thank you all for questions and comments during the defense which fostered such an engaging and intellectually rigorous conversation. I will continue to reflect on and *feel* my 'becoming' body.

My academic journey did not begin with my PhD. I thank Drs. Deborah Langan, Tania Das Gupta, John Dwyer, Belarie Zatzman, Ron Singer, Ross Stuart, Leo David, Harry Smaller and the late Carole Yawney for seeing and naming my potential earlier on. A special thank you to my former outstanding TA Karen Flynn, now Dr. Flynn. It meant the world for me to see you, a Black woman in the academy, and realize if you were there that I too could take my rightful place. Representation matters. University of Toronto Drs. June Larkin and Sandra Acker (my MA supervisors) and Dr. M. Jacqui Alexander, who always reminded me to honour the sacred dimension of women's experience, I thank you for your instrumental role in my journey. Ryerson University's Dr. Ben Barry, thank you for unleashing the power of fashion as an analytical tool towards equity. You inspire me. Drs. Nikki Pascetta and Jane Griffith thank you for your support in the 11th hour. To all the academic, activist and professional 'listening ears', friends, allies, colleagues and mentors I've had – too many to list – I couldn't have done it without you.

I cannot even begin to find the words of gratitude to my communities, my friends who are chosen family (you know who you are), my dear mother, my eternally optimistic sis (who I found later in life), my cats – past and present – and lastly to my rock and better half Aisha. My mother brought me into this world and has worked tirelessly showing me the value of self-love. Her gift keeps on giving. Mom, we've come a long way from 4100! Aisha, my dear, you hold me up, you sustain me, you are my endless joy. Thank you for loving me – especially through this chapter of our life. We did it!

To my ancestors, I cannot tell you how many times I've called on you in the middle of a sleepless night at my laptop for strength and with each and every instance you availed. To the fat Black girl or woman out there who might read this – we are enough just the way we are. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

…In 1993, like many teenaged girls in my neighbourhood, I was in love with Le Chateau's cotton-spandex blend, spaghetti and racer-strapped summer dresses. I fiercely wore a beautiful blue, size large, ankle-length, body-fitter the day I boarded the Scarborough[2] *Rapid Transit (SRT) at the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) Kennedy station stop. I was heading to Tropicana's Scarborough Youth Resource Centre (SYRC). Sadly, I never made it to the 'Rep Centre'*[3] *that day. A few moments after boarding, a man readably late 20s came on with what I perceived as a menacingly large, growling Rottweiler without a muzzle. The man proceeded to sit next to me. His legs sprawled out as though entitled to all the space, squeezing me hard into the corner, with the dog mere inches away facing me…its eyes dead locked with mine. I was petrified, fidgeting somewhat, and instinctively tried to shrink into the seat because in my mind if I were less visible the dog wouldn't notice me. I was about to find out just how visible I was…*

*Moments later the man sharply turned to me and screamed, "If you weren't such a f*cking, Fat, Black b*itch you wouldn't be afraid of my dog!" I gasped. I could smell his bad breath and can still remember his saliva droplets slapping my face. Before I could breath, he abruptly got up, pulled the dog and exited at Lawrence East – just one station from where the ordeal began. It all happened so fast. He got off and all I could hear was*

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[2] Scarborough is a district and former municipality within the eastern part of the city of Toronto, Ontario Canada. It is one of the most multicultural, ethnically diverse areas of the Greater Toronto Area with the majority of residents being visible persons of colour.

[3] The 'Rep Centre' was slang for Tropicana's then Youth Resource Centre (SYRC) located inside the Scarborough Town Centre mall in the 1990s. We, the community youth participants, affectionately referred to it as the "rep" centre because of its 'cool' *rep*utation in Scarborough. Programming included life skills, employment assistance, mentorship/counselling, arts, entertainment, cultural gatherings, and other interventions to help facilitate our success both in school and the community.

laughter. And those who didn't laugh 'politely' ignored the incident and refused to notice my young gaze. I saw young people like me laughing at me, women and girls like me laughing at me, Black people like me laughing at me that day. I was mortified. I quickly exited at Ellesmere station, the next stop, and burst into tears in a corner on the SRT train platform. No one came to my aid. I never forgot that day…

Jill Andrew, excerpt from *Fat in The City: Monologues of Corpulent Proportions (aka The Fat Monologues)* workshop (Studio 180 'In Development' Program, November 2015)

My dissertation documents and examines the body stories of seven cisgender women who identify as members of the African, Black, Caribbean (ABC) Diaspora in Toronto, Ontario and who self-identify as fat or another euphemism used to describe fat such as plus size, curvy, big, big-boned, large or voluptuous. By utilizing the concept "body stories," I capture a more nuanced, interconnected, interactive and complex telling of our understanding, perception and experience of and through our body. Body "image" suggests a static fixed body unmitigated through our social interactions and varying times and spaces. I am calling for a shift away from how body image is often thought of as an 'event,' a visual 'thing,' a 'feeling' towards body, mind and environmental interactivity. Rather than asking how is your body image, a deeper question may be what are your body stories? Through participant body stories spanning from girl to adulthood, the dissertation documents and reflects upon the ways in which experiences in and through their bodies at school, the workplace, with family and other significant interactions with people and objects address and inform their ongoing identity constructions. Inspired by the

concept of code-switching[4] (Young and Barrett, et. al., 2014), used in linguistics to illustrate a person's switch between languages – often resorting to one identified as more stereotypically mainstream, respectable or professional in order to project a desired 'veneer' identity in a particular setting, I propose the concept of 'clothes-switching' or 'clothes-meshing' – the strategic use of dress configurations and other self-fashioning practices as a form of literacy. In Alison Lurie's *The Language of Clothes* (1981), she asserts that fashion is a language with a particular 'grammar' and vocabulary. Clothes are visual vocabulary. Clothing choices – our worn language – are material and symbolic discourses we utilize to move through our world and shape our identities. Wardrobe choices are therefore not monolithic or accidental and are consistently responding to and creating the social. I investigate whether some communications through dress may be seen as more 'acceptable' representations of gendered fatness and/or blackness within predominantly White, thin-centric spaces. This represents an integral aspect of the societal schooling of my participants' bodies and the ongoing aesthetic "border work" (Haig-Brown, 1990) many engage in for the purpose of appearance and identity management as they negotiate outsider-within (Collins, 1986) identities in family, school, workplace and other socializing environments.

[4] *In Other People's English… (*2014) Young et al. outline their concerns with code-switching and its potential to make Black children and adults feel a sense of inferiority about their cultural linguistics and dialects. The authors argue that code-switching promotes a segregationist rather than an integrationist model of literacy instruction (3). In other words, the notion of "speaking white" at school or the workplace – essentially "code-switching" – and then reverting to "speaking black" among safer spaces of family or friends (or in professional spaces when Whites are not present) does not encourage high esteem instead it promotes the need to hide important facets of how we present and communicate ourselves to others. The notion of "black" or "white" talk further sets up a standard of difference where Whiteness remains comfortably at the centre with all else as the lesser 'alternative.' Code-meshing means rather than choosing one 'code' of communication over the other, Young, Barrett et al. (2014) advocate for blended 'mesh' of communication. I relate this and the concept of code-switching to clothing in that certain clothes/accessories are used by some to pivot and project certain aspects of self that are deemed more 'respectable' and socially 'acceptable' than others. Furthermore, some outfits represent a 'blend' of old selves with new selves – old items with new items to help construct a desirable aesthetic image.

My scholarship emerges in the interstices between Education, Fat Studies, Fashion, Anti-Racism, Feminist, Social Sciences and indeed other humanities disciplines. I chose Education as my primary foundation for this research because certain aspects of women's stories are too easily remaindered to the margin and how we think and feel about our bodies is inextricably linked to varying forms of education[5] we engage in throughout our life span. My participants' body stories can arguably add to the literature on Black girl and women's schooling experiences. There is a shortage of scholarship on Black girlhood (hooks, 1996) and in particular the educational experiences of Black girls and women, in both high school and graduate education, have historically been marginalized within educational and schooling literature (Carty, 1991; Bannerji, 1991, 1993; Gabriel & Tate, 2017; Wane, Deliovsky et al., 2002; Wood, 2011; Neeganagwedgin, 2013). Scholarship on Black students in Canada tends to focus on the experiences of Black boys and men's alienation in the education system, the systemic and social reasons they are pushed out of school (Dei, Mazzuca et al, 1997; James, 2011) or on comparisons between Black and White student success (Sewell, 1997; Gillborn, 2008a, 2008b; Klein, Richardson et al., 2007). Maxine Wood (2011) in her scholarship on Black young women in Canada, their schooling experiences, relationships formed with peers and educators, and how these inform their identity construction, borrows the term 'absented presence' from Black Canadian interdisciplinary scholar Rinaldo Walcott (2003). Wood utilizes the term to signal the general absence of issues and concerns specific to Black girls in analyses of schooling. Walcott (2003), in his scholarship on Black identities, cultures and politics in Canada, employs the concept to theorize the way in

[5] Education within the context of this dissertation is not to be solely linked with traditional learning in schools or professional training. Education, for this study implies societal learning and the processes of acquiring knowledge and societal 'codes' pertaining to beliefs, behaviours and expectations among other social and cultural elements.

which Blacks and blackness are systemically rendered invisible and peripheral at best within the Canadian imaginary and nation-state building.

While this dissertation is not exclusively education-focused and cannot represent the experiences of all Black women living in Canada, it does offer insight to the linkages between schooling, participants' reflections on their embodied experiences, and ways in which schooling practices and curriculum among other pedagogical sites of significance beyond traditional classrooms must concern itself with the materiality of bodies, especially marginalized bodies, in a more substantive way. My dissertation will support educators in leading younger generations towards a more equitable freeing engagement with embodied difference. For example, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)[6], collects statistical and qualitative data on student schooling experiences. According to the statistics, body image issues such as body-based discrimination is the most prevalent form of bullying.[7] Quoted by Henry A. Giroux (2010) in Giroux's "Rethinking Education as the Practice of Freedom: Paulo Freire and the Promise of Critical Pedagogy," Paulo Freire asserts, "education as the practice of freedom as opposed to education as the practice of domination denies that [humans are] abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people" (2010: 81). Our bodies and our world experiences are inextricably linked. As an educator-

[6] According to statistics from the TDSB, Canada's largest elementary and secondary school board servicing over 249,000, students' body-shaming is the most prevalent form of bullying. According to the 2006 TDSB Student Census Report, discrimination on the basis of body image was the highest form of harassment and/or areas of concern reported within the grade 7/8 platform. The trend of body-based harassment also permeated high school with 27% of grades 9-12 students reporting being treated negatively based on other people's perceptions of their bodies. In 2011, the student census showed that only 58 percent of students in Grades 9 through 12 and 67 percent in Grades 7 and 8 said they liked how they looked.

[7] It is necessary to contextualize this statement: Since body-image discrimination can also include discrimination based on race, sex, gender expression, disability and other intersecting subjectivities, it is not explicitly clear from TDSB statistics what 'aspect' of body image said children are being bullied based on. Body image is traditionally (and limitingly) focussed on size and weight issues. Therefore, we are unaware of how expansive the school board's understanding of 'body image' might be. TDSB's statistics on racism, which is the second highest, for example experienced by children could very well be attacks on their skin tone or hair texture for instance thus also related to body image.

activist, I incorporate critical body image and identity politics throughout my teachings in equity and inclusivity, diversity, human rights education, and fashion diversity studies with elementary, secondary and postsecondary students. I often rely on the personal stories of my students and my own as an entry point. Consistently, their reflections on their bodies often foreground discussions on race, gender, class, embodied aesthetics (their looks) and experiences with inequity. Educational settings in and outside of traditional classrooms, as pedagogical or even performative sites, provide distinct vantage points from which to observe the construction and function of social, cultural, symbolic and institutionalized capital for different, minoritized bodies (Muñoz, 1999).

According to philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, "the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste" in that one's hairstyle, clothing, diet and even posture function as signs within a larger system of social positions (Bourdieu, 1984: 190). For Bourdieu, bodies are biological but are also in unfinished states of becoming and are imbued with both ascribed and achieved marks of social class within society. Bodies that challenge dominant body image ideals and in essence do not "make the grade" such as fat and Black bodies are often discredited as transgressive deficits devoid of capital. The moral imperative cast on marginalized bodies is that they must assimilate to normative body standards whether through diet, clothes-switching or other vices in order to gain credibility and to demonstrate 'good citizenship' through their embodiment. This dissertation argues that bodies then can be read as another form of credential – what I refer to as 'corporeal credentials' – within educational settings residing somewhere on the pass/fail spectrum with racialized, feminized, fat bodies positioned significantly lower on the hierarchy than historically idealized white, thin bodies. For example, sociologist and critical race

theorist Margaret L. Hunter's research documents lighter-skinned students receiving better treatment from teachers than darker-skinned students (Hunter, 2005).

Educational settings are implicated in the construction and reproduction of dominant discourses on body size and which bodies are rendered desirable. Through interviews, fat university students have reflected on their gender, race, class and other subjectivities while referencing the size of desks, chairs and other structural aspects of their schools as tangible barriers to their well-being and full participation (Gullage, 2010). These artifacts of structural and 'spatial discrimination' (Owen, 2012) serve as daily microaggressions that physically work to deny, ignore and exclude fat subjectivities in preference of a thin student body by literally making it difficult for fat bodies to 'fit' into scholastic environments (Gullage, 2010). Fatness, within educational settings that historically mirror and reproduce societal injustices (Shilling, 2012), is not a desired corporeal credential. Adipose,[8] due to its perceived 'moral decay' does not receive a passing grade.

The symbolic efficacy of educational credentials (i.e. degrees, diplomas) signal the assumption of attained knowledge/skill and publicly validate one as having true social value. Furthermore, schooling understood through sociology of education helps to make and to impose the legitimate exclusions and inclusions through the transmission of cultural capital across generations which form the basis of the social order (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). Bodies are 'schooled' both in and outside of traditional education settings in a variety of other pedagogical sites including the family, the workplace, everyday community spaces ands social exchanges and

[8] Adipose tissue, or fat, is an anatomical term for loose connective tissue composed of adipocytes.
Its main role is to store energy in the form of fat, although it also cushions and insulates the body. Excess 'adipose' or excess fat is routinely vilified especially within 'obesity epidemic' health rhetoric. However, fat activists such as Substantia Jones, founder of and photographer behind photo-activism campaign The Adipositivity Project, are actively engaged in reclaiming adipose through projects which affirmingly display fatness as beautiful and desirable.

increasingly social media. The participant body stories in this dissertation provide evidence of this ongoing process of learning and unlearning in and through their bodies in relation to their worlds.

The seven participants vary in their socio-economic background, family composition, body size, sexuality, age and occupation. As such, while there are many commonalities in the body stories shared, the stories are not homogenous and therefore do not provide generalizations on lived experiences of fatness and Blackness for all cisgender women in Toronto. Arguably, I am the eighth participant as my autobiographical voice also appears in the dissertation. Due to the interconnectivity of social factors impacting this research, I find myself needing to acknowledge and include myself and moments of my embodied experiences as a Black, fat, cisgender woman also living in Toronto in my work. Therefore, the introduction begins with one of my body stories from childhood. My experience on the public transit further demonstrates how fat phobia intersecting with racism and sexism can play out for some women in Toronto. My story is my evidence of the violating disdain often afforded to bodies outside of the so-called norm. Fatness and Blackness converging on women's bodies can be met with violent, oppressive public scrutiny. My participants' body stories, of both accommodation and resistance towards normalized body ideas, help me explore how social interactions inform fat, Black women's identity constructions. What meanings and lessons are taken from these social interactions and how do they influence fat, Black women's everyday life experiences? The research questions informing my study relate to 1) social interactions and identity construction; 2) access to embodied currency, and 3) about participants' accommodating and resisting, both strategic and otherwise, body norms.

Situating Me: My Body Story

It is impossible to separate my embodied experience from this work. This move reflects my understanding of researcher lived experience as being central to the way in which we see, interact, research and therefore theorize our own and others' lives from a decolonized perspective (Oakley, 1981, Hesse-Biber, 2011; Smith, 1999). It echoes critical feminist and anti-racist premises regarding research and practice as inseparable (Collins, 2009; Moraga & Anzaldua, 2015). The dissertation does not nor can it seek to cover all aspects of the participants' lives, experiences in, or thoughts about their bodies. It does pay attention to certain social, familial, institutional interactions and relationships with certain objects participants have and how this frames their body stories, the way they and others read their bodies, and therefore my participants' ability to negotiate their complex identities. I also pay particular attention to participant memories of their bodies in clothing from childhood to adulthood and their use of fashion, dress and personal style as a communicative tool for navigating their social interactions with significant and generalized others in their lives. Participants express ways in which their clothing choices help them accommodate and resist dominant narratives pertaining to normalized beauty ideals on race, gender, body size and image.

As a cisgender woman who is Black, queer, and has publicly left, what Sedgwick and Moon call "the closet of size" (1993) and has 'come out' as fat (Chastain, 2015; Murray, 2008; Pausé, 2012; Sedgwick, 1990, 1993; Sullivan, 2013), this research is meaningful to me in several ways. Not only do I have firsthand experience with fat-shaming and anti-Black racism in and outside of fat and Black communities, but I am also acutely aware of the manifestations of contradiction I walk with in my own body. I am a well-known fat activist in the city who also identifies as a body image or body confidence advocate according to the particular audience I am

addressing and what my needs are in any particular interaction. In corporate exchanges, I often identify myself as a body image or confidence advocate due to stigma associated with the word fat, which can be damaging for sponsorship requests. I also fluctuate between using the labels activist, advocate and ally for similar reasons with 'advocate' and 'ally' being more salient in standardized corporations and organizations unfamiliar with fat activist and anti-racist critical discourses on fatness and blackness. As a vocal community supporter of advocacy groups such as Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO), I, like many others who dare to identify anti-Black racism as an issue still relevant within a so-called 'post-racial', 'multicultural' Canada, have received discriminatory comments and trolling, especially via social media, due to our affiliations no matter how peripheral.

I am co-founder of Body Confidence Canada (BCC) an advocacy group advocating for equitable and inclusive images, messages, practices and policies supporting body diversity. BCC produces the Body Confidence Canada Awards (BCCAs), which acknowledges people across Canada who are challenging body-related status quos. Celebration without systemic change is an empty promise towards ending social injustice. Through our national campaign #SizeismSUCKS, I and partners advocate for legislative changes to Canada's human rights legislation to include size and appearance as protected grounds against discrimination. Our group also created Body Confidence Awareness Week, recognized during the second week of October, to help schools facilitate critical conversations related to body-based discrimination and harassment. From diverse fashion shows, fundraisers, to the creation of BITE ME! Toronto Int'l Body Image Film & Arts Festival in 2009, I have co-created programming to help advance various audience's understanding of critical social justice issues pertaining to body justice, representations and interpretations of bodies, body images and the ways in which our bodies

actively resist against normalized narratives of identity. My community work understands the body as entwined in processes of becoming – being made and unmade through movements and connections with other beings and things, rather than as separate fixed or stable units (Helps, 2007: 130). Body and embodiment philosopher Gail Weiss explains this further by stating that the body is never isolated in its activity but always already engaged with the world (Weiss, 1999: 3-6). From my selection of films, speakers, to venue space, my programming reflects this philosophy of bodies. My work as a self-identified Black feminist fat activist, body image advocate, has been my attempt to tell stories of our lived experiences, liberation, activisms and resistances through our bodies, predominantly women and girls' fat, Black and otherwise marginalized body stories. I prioritize stories not usually told through mainstream body image literature. I privilege the voice of women like myself who may occupy bodies often researched away into voiceless objects and for whom there have been long histories of exclusion (Maracle, 1996; Rivers-Moore, 2013; Wane & Massaquoi, 2007). I also hope to illuminate the complexity within body stories.

Despite my identity as a fat activist and body image advocate, I embody contradiction. I am also a fat person who has evaluated my media interviews to see how much weight the TV or a magazine profile has added to my face. I catch myself at times engaged in my own internalized performances of thinness (Luckett, 2018) such as tilting my head in particular ways during a selfie in hopes that I may capture my 'best' – read: thinnest – facial angle. I observe whether or not my thinning hair is hyper-visible in media photo shoots. I also occasionally grapple with accommodating "feminine" status quos through various respectability practices such as wearing eye concealer to cover my 'racoon' eyes and "putting myself together" by wearing certain articles of clothing I feel may provide me with more sized, raced and gendered social and

cultural capital in my social interactions. As a queer Black woman, I'm also aware of the manner in which certain sartorial choices I make get coded as too 'masculine' or not 'feminine' enough such as my fondness of men's shoes which are a pragmatic, comfortable and fashionable choice for my size 11/12 women's feet and my penchant for monochromatic pant suits with just the right accent of colour usually through an accessory. I know firsthand what it is like to be told, "Jill, you carry your weight well" and to be both angry and flattered by the supposed compliment.

As a young child, I secretly guzzled well over the recommended dose for an adult of my mother's weight loss shake only to end up in the hospital and then in life-saving surgery days later. Reflecting on this as an adult, it is possible I was attempting to get rid of that stomach I was all too often told by relatives to hold in. I still remember what it felt like to receive a pair of underwear as a child easily three times too big for my buttocks and the shame I felt realizing that is the size the person perceived me as. As a teenager, I was often teased by peers and told I had a large forehead. Some students would call me Somalian, thinking this was supposed to be an insult, and then scurry away laughing. My nose however was coveted by many. According to some peers, I didn't have a 'Black nose' in that it was "real beautiful, fine featured and different." In *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics*, cultural sociologist Shirley Tate argues that there is no inherent attribute of beauty (2009). Racialized judgements on what is read as 'beauty' [or not] are learned within the context of communal, societal and global beauty ideals. The essentialism embedded in the idea of a 'Black' nose illustrates the social construction of beauty and the mobilization of external beauty knowledge used as currency to race or e*race* bodies. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I may have seen my nose as a form of embodied capital so much so that when presented with an opportunity to learn karate and boxing through a free

community program for teenagers in Scarborough, I declined in fear of ruining my 'perfect' "non-Black" nose. I adored both sports.

Reflecting as a survivor of trauma, I have had a complicated relationship with my body. At times, it fought against me and I'd be hospitalized, I sat through years of therapy, multiple surgeries, being told what I could and could not eat and what signs to look out for should my body 'strike' again. I learned very young that while I loved my body I had grown to be very critical of it, how it looked, how I dressed it for public display and consumption, and how it functioned. I also became very accustomed to others evaluating and pathologizing my body. As I began to learn that I was fat, and I witnessed my fatness change over the years, I have also observed the ways in which my fatness, Blackness and my identity as a cisgender Black woman has converged in the minds, words and actions of others. For instance, I've had certain White and openly queer graduate school professors read my body, while I was crying, as a symbol of inadequacy, threat, aggression, annoyance, and "concern" to their physical safety – all simultaneously. My schooling experience is unfortunately not unique (Gabriel & Tate, 2017). Regrettably, these memories are not only reflective of my adulthood. Readings of my Black, fat woman body and even my then taller than most, larger-bellied, Black girlchild body have framed my social interactions and informed the way I feel about my own body, the space I take up, my sartorial choices, and the activisms I participate in today. When I research women's body image within most fat studies and feminist literature, I do not see many stories that mirror my experiences. This dissertation demonstrates the struggles of (dis)embodiment for some Black women but it also serves as a testament to us living in our bodies at the intersections of fatness, Blackness, other subjectivities and our Black girl/Black womanhood. As Dr. Melissa Harris-Perry states in the foreword of Trimiko Melancon and Joanne M. Braxton's *Black Female*

Sexualities (2015), "To be an embodied Black woman is also to know joy, subjectivity, pleasure, and the latent capacity to enjoy being seen: to, in a sense, transcend invisibility and to resist erasure" (ix). As such, my dissertation makes visible parts of the body stories of seven Black women living in Toronto through the eyes of a Black woman researcher who lives in Toronto. My lived experience and feminist researcher lens are unapologetically entwined. This is my personal and political move as researcher towards reframing us from the periphery to the center.

Statement of the Problem

Participants in this study share thick stories about their body's interconnectedness through their childhood memories, adult experiences and interactions with other significant (i.e. family unit) and general persons (strangers) in their lives. Participant body stories illustrate how clothing, occupation, dating and schooling realities among others are often wrapped up in deeper narratives of how we wish to project ourselves socially. At the core of this exploration is the women's relationships with their complex and contradictory social worlds and by extension their own bodies as Black and fat women. The body story themes shed light on the politics of forging relationships as past children and as current adults in the skin they are in and the ways in which certain social interactions, memberships or exclusions, and participating in certain activities such as body activisms or community engagements, both in-person and online, as Black women with corporeal excess, has helped them make sense of their feelings about their bodies.

The racial makeup of my participants is intentional in order to foreground the body stories of Black fat women. Black women, and especially Black fat women, are often ignored or included as an afterthought within 'mainstream' women's body image literature which usually centers the body concerns and experiences of predominantly white, middle-class and

heterosexual women (Thompson, 1992, 1994, Grogan, 2008[9]). Some participants identify as Black, African-Canadian, African, while others identify as variations of these, including mixed-race, combined with their familial or ancestral ties to the United States or their parents' birthplace within the Caribbean region or the African continent. Although 'Black' identification is often defined by certain phenotypical features such as skin colour and hair texture (Blay, 2011), and I use the descriptive term Black predominantly in the dissertation, it is important to note that there are cultural, geographic and aesthetic implications in the term (Wane, Katerina et al., 2002). Participant self-identification is further influenced by their personal and political opinions on race and identity. The variety of terms further suggests that, although there is often a remarkable similarity among embodied black experiences that can form the basis of a shared understanding among Black people and arguably others as to how we are viewed and treated within society despite our individual differences as Black people (Young, 2010), there is also a rich heterogeneity within 'Black' communities that is often disregarded. As many scholars have explicitly noted, the term Black has its limitations.

By documenting and examining my participants' body stories, I capture the fluidity and contradiction of bodies as inextricably linked to the social (Shilling, 2003, 2012; Fraser & Greco, 2008; Coleman, 2008) and the influence of different times, spaces, people, places, sizes, powers and objects on how we understand and experience our lived bodies. Our bodies are our immediate access to the world. How we read them interactively and how they are read or not inform our social interactions and the value that we and others give to some bodies as opposed to others. Our social interactions, which I also conceive of as our *socializing* interactions in other

[9] Sarah Grogan's 3rd edition (2017) tries to explore the intersectional impact of class, race and sexuality on body image and body dissatisfaction but overall the additions in the updated edition are still merely additive and need to be more comprehensive and centered.

words, interactions that help socialize us, are literally the "threads" that bind us. These threads are the key messages, instructions and warnings, spoken and unspoken, we receive from family, schools, our workplaces, our intimate and platonic relationships, our interactions in the fashion and clothing marketplace and other economies as Black fat women. Socializing 'threads' in many cases 'bind' us not necessarily together – although they can – but they bind us in the sense of helping us to 'keep things together' as we navigate against discrimination as best we can with an air of resistance or resilience. Binding also implies that at times our "threads" are also hindering and can pose as limitations to our growth as evidenced by some of the participant body stories. The "threads" that bind us can also be understood as "societal curriculum" (Cortes, 1979, 2000) or the massive ongoing informal curriculum of families, peer groups, our churches, shopping malls, doctors' offices, institutions and other socializing forces that educate us throughout our lives and transmit hegemonic or counter-scripts on acceptable bodyhood. These societal curriculums provide key messages that assist us in organizing our ideas, disseminating values, altering expectations and modeling behaviour.

In my research, I employ critical feminist research methods, specifically qualitative unstructured interviews, and then the body stories are thematically analyzed. The analysis of emerging, similar, and competing experiences and themes illuminate how participants make sense of their fat bodies intersecting with their race, gender, class and sexuality, among other social locations they occupy. Their body stories also demonstrate how these embodiments influence the way they define, reflect on, and experience their body identities through various life stages and histories from childhood to adulthood and participants' everyday interpersonal interactions via schooling, intimate relationships, obtaining clothing and the workplace for example.

Additionally, participant interviews shed light on the reverse relationship: how their life experiences have also shaped their relationship(s) with their bodies. This work is necessary because often times women's life stories and standpoints are not theorized and storytellers are not considered to be sources of expert knowledge. (Harding, 2004; Collins, 2009; Smith, 1990). Traditionally, work that theorizes about the body through the situation of women, particularly if it makes use of unique personal experience, has rarely been accorded the privileged status of theory (Bordo, 1998: 86). My research is an exploration into my participants' shared accounts of lived bodies and processes of embodiment and how these signal ways in which the object-body is, actively experienced, produced, sustained, and/or transformed as a subject-body (Waskul & Vannini, 2006).

This dissertation adds to critical feminisms such as Black feminist thought and anti-racist feminism, fat studies, social constructionist and sartorial scholarship[10] on women's body stories. By foregrounding the stories of Black women in Toronto, my research also debunks the often Americentric lens of research on women's bodies, especially Black and fat women's bodies, and helps to close the gap in this literature. In Canadian literature, there has been a steady move towards more diverse representations and analyses of women embodied, lived experiences in terms of weight, sexuality, disability, physical difference, race, and hair politics, sexuality and physical difference (Barry, 2007; Mitchell & Rundle et al., 2001; Ellison, McPhail et al., 2016; Prince, 2009; Rice, 2014; Thompson, 2015).

This is a brief review of some Canadian titles that have left an indelible mark on my scholarly interest in this study. Mitchell, Rundle and Karaian's edited anthology *Talking Young*

[10] Sartorial scholarship interrogates the meaning of dress, self-fashioning and other aesthetics practices, performances, and processes to how we construct and negotiate our identities in various times and across multiple spaces. (Entwistle, 2000, 2015; Rocamora & Smelik, 2016))

Feminisms: Turbo Chicks (2001). *Talking Young Feminisms* recorded the voice of different women from varied walks of life and while it did not exclusively center the bodies of Black women, some Black contributors wrote on how their "feminism" had been shaped through the lens of their race, lesbian identity and/or fatness for instance. This book inspired me to begin a since defunct anthology project in 2003 *Phat Girls in Search of Pretty World: Hot Lil Phat Chicks Speaking Out!* Phat Girls is now the inspiration for my current anthology *In Our Skin: Our Bodies, Our Stories* co-edited in progress with Demeter Press and co-editor Dr. May Friedman.

Fashion scholar Ben Barry's *Fashioning Reality: A New Generation of Entrepreneurship* (2007) chronicled the creation of his modelling agency the Ben Barry Agency in 1997 which was the first internationally recognized agency to represent size, age, disabled and racially diverse modelling talent in Canada. Barry's more recent work has problematized heteronormative masculinity (arguing instead for hybrid masculinities), gender binaries and raced fashion assumptions that intersect with masculinity ideals which operate in fashion to maintain social hierarchies of belonging and *un*belonging in the industry and in everyday self-fashioning choices (Barry & Martin, 2016a, 2016b). Through sartorial biographies, wardrobe interviews, fashion shows and qualitative interviews, Barry's scholarship has documented the power of fashion in identity. Rice's *Becoming Women: The Embodied Self in Image Culture* (2014) focused especially on voices from marginalized and under-represented groups of women who came of age during second and third wave feminism. Rice situates the stories of women aged twenty to forty-five who have grown up in what she describes as, "an image-saturated world replete with visual technologies like cameras, scales…as well as methods for modifying their appearance including skin-lightening products and cosmetic surgery" (2014: 4). Through Rice's interviews

with hundreds of women via semi-structured one on one qualitative interviews, questionnaires and phone interviews, she documented women's experiences with weight, race, disability and other attributes regarded as abject. Ellison, McPhail and Mitchinson's *Obesity in Canada: Critical Perspectives* (2016)[11] has officially placed Canada on the map in terms of fat scholarship as it is the first collection in the area of critical obesity studies from a distinctly Canadian perspective and one that foregrounds the role of systemic discrimination, histories of anti-Indigenous racism, colonialism and its impact on naming and *maintaining* the collective aberrance towards fat bodies. These examples demonstrate Canada's growing engagement with embodied difference and each scholar mentioned above vastly contributes to the conversation by challenging the narrow, normalized definitions of body image and beauty that circulate in the everyday and through the adoption of state and educationally sanctioned policies and ideologies. My scholarship adds to this body of work by specifically foregrounding Black women's fat bodies, their experiences and their subjects and objects of significance to the shaping of their body stories. This exclusive specificity is missing from these Canadian publications.

Although the volume of Canadian literature pales in comparison to the number of qualitative texts published in the United States on Black women's' lived experiences and our bodies, there is literature, published in Toronto, that does provide insight into my study on Black women's bodies. Black feminist scholar Makeda Silvera's *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women about their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada* (1989) was one of the first "adult" books I ever read at the age of 12. I purchased a copy of the book in the

[11] *Obesity in Canada: Critical Perspectives*' (2016) book cover image is of a readably white woman. I am always intrigued by the choices authors and/or publishers make for their book covers as I argue these covers hold substantial power in naming and un-naming the books audience. My hypothesis isn't foolproof but a white woman on the cover does play into the dominant narrative of who the 'face' of fat scholarship tends to be and whose narrative remains normalized.

basement of a neighbourhood church fair. Silvera's decolonized method of oral histories documenting the stories of ten Black women's lives is an explicit departure from the quantitative survey or questionnaire. It also directly centers the lives of Black women, a rarity, and provides the platform for them to speak for themselves. Silvera's *Black Girl Talk: the black girls* (1995) also centered the lives of Black and other racialized girls speaking for themselves on experiences with racism, sexism, relationships, and body image for example. The artistic renderings of celebrated Black Canadian artists such as Grace Channer and Sandra Brewster have also provided opportunities for me to see Black bodies depicted and represented through intriguing visual richness while simultaneously conversing with ideas of race, identity, representation, history, time, space and lived experience. For instance, Brewster's *Cool* series (1997-2000) and *Stance* series (2003) were both concerned with unpacking the divide between self-perception and public perception of Black bodies and Black communities signaling the cultural diversity within the African diaspora in Canada.

Black women's hair stories[12] have been documented by sociologist, essayist and novelist Althea Prince's, *The Politics of Black Women's Hair* (2009*)* and also in visual culture, communications, race and representation scholar Cheryl Thompson's "Black Women & Identity: What's Hair Got to Do with It?" (2009) for example. Prince documents hair stories of Black women from Canada, South America (Guyana), the Caribbean, United States and the United Kingdom through the personal essay and conversations with her participants. Prince invited ten women to contribute to the discussion by allowing her to interview them (23). The text added to the conversation on how Black women's hair is perceived, judged, and graded against the

[12] Trey Anthony's *Da Kink in My Hair stage* play debuted in 2001 at the Toronto Fringe Festival. The play in later years was produced as a half-hour weekly television series on Global Television Network. The play tackled the importance of Black women's body stories from our hair to our experiences with gender-based violence, body-shaming, family, community struggles, sexuality, depression and making it as a Black woman in the workplace.

dominant beauty ideal on hair texture, length and colour. On the reason for her methodological decisions, she states that she wanted "something personal…Words that make heart-connections between the reader and the things discussed in the book" (17). Prince's literature destabilizes any assumption of Black women's cultural immunity against Eurocentric beauty ideals. Thompson's "Black Women & Identity…" also situates the politics of Black women's hair. Thompson contends that our hair, and the way it is presented as unprocessed (i.e. kinky) or processed (straight pressed or chemically permed and with plenty movement) has a direct impact on the way in which people read and therefore treat us.

By documenting the seven Black fat women's body stories in this dissertation, and moments of my own experience, I challenge cultural immunity theories that suggest Black women have less complicated relationships or memories of their body size, weight, shape and other aesthetics primarily due to 'protection' against body image concerns because our racial membership is a buffer – a protective shield (Hesse-Biber & Howling et al., 2004; Hesse-Biber 2005 Patton, 2006; Poran, 2002, 2006). According to body image research based in cultural immunity theories, Black women have fewer concerns about weight than White women (Grogan, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Howling et al., 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2005; Patton, 2006; Poran, 2002, 2006) and are instead primarily concerned with issues of skin tone, hair texture and the added pressure of racist and sexist oppression. While Black women are concerned with these issues, the assumption that size, particularly fatness, is normalized for Black women is inaccurate (Shaw, 2005; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Sullivan, 2013). This dissertation seeks to challenge this assumption and hopes to put forward alternate, sometimes contradictory narratives. Stereotypical assumptions based in cultural immunity protection theories often rely on socially constructed tropes (Mowatt, French et. al; 2013) such as the strong Black woman archetype (Collins, 1991;

2009; Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012) among other controlling images that do not allow for the complexity and range of histories, reflections and experiences noted by my participants – histories and experiences that directly inform their present selves.

As explained by Black feminist thought scholar Patricia Hill Collins, controlling images of Black women have been used to excuse the intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender and sexuality that converge on Black women's bodies (2009). They also contribute to the objectification of Black women as a singular Other – separate and inferior to the White feminized subject. According to Collins, "Binary thinking shapes understandings of human difference. In such thinking, difference is defined in oppositional terms. One part is not simply different from its counterpart; it is inherently opposed to the "Other"" (Collins, 2009: 77). While the impact of such binary thinking has been extensively discussed in critical theory, black women nevertheless continue to be siloed into a reductive singularity. Controlling images contribute to an "interlocking system" (Collins, 2009) of oppression – a matrix of domination (Collins, 2009) – for Black women that strives to make racism, sexism and I argue fatism, as evidenced in the Mammy controlling image, appear to be normalized aspects of everyday life for us. They also create environments where cultural immunity and protective theories flourish while erasing Black women's standpoints. Often absent in these cultural protection theories are the histories of domination and objectification that have primarily rendered racialized women's bodies as objects, highly sexualized or asexual, economic 'drains' on the system such as the welfare queen stereotype, as property and, through Eurocentric beauty and respectability standards, as the antithesis of idealized white femininity. These stereotypies rely on exclusionary theory and reductive research practices informed by racist misogynistic assumptions often ignorant of the impact of the 'cult of thinness' (Hesse-Biber, 2006; 2007) or what Kim Chernin

first named the ‘tyranny of slenderness’ (1981) and the expected race towards the beauty myth of perfection which is unattainable even for white women.

More than recording seven Black women’s body stories of accommodation and resistance to societally normalized body ideals, their life experiences in their bodies, and their interactions with others and objects, the research also hopes to reveal community building strategies that may be employed by participants. By documenting participants’ potential social organizing, participation in certain practices like dressing, clothing selection, facilitating workshops, performing, blogging or online viewing of blogs and how they advocate to build community, healthy relationships, and potential activist spaces as fat Black women in Toronto, I may be able to understand more deeply where their sites of learning and unlearning both oppressive and liberating social scripts pertaining to body ideals around fatness and blackness originate and the spaces where learning, unlearning and relearning can and do take place. The threads that bind my participants through their body stories and the key themes of this study are the social interactions, the environments and objects of great meaning, such as their dress, that have helped to inform these seven women’s body stories and in particular their blackness and fatness. Their body stories also add to the literature on fat stigma by documenting moments where their bodies, often read as hyper-visible bodies of excess – too much “fatness,” “Blackness” or both, can be paradoxically read as invisible, afforded less access to resources such as love, desirability, respect, family and access to fashionable, reasonably priced clothing, jobs, housing, healthcare or education due to intersecting fat discrimination and anti-Black racism and misogyny otherwise known as *misogynoir* for instance. Misogynoir, coined in 2008 by Black queer feminist scholar Moya Bailey, is a concept used to indicate when both race and gender oppression are operating against Black trans and cisgender women.

This dissertation creates new knowledge on how these women experience, process and contextualize their lives within a world often visually saturated by a majority of images of women who are predominantly thin, white, able-bodied and heterosexual. When Black images are presented in popular culture and positioned as 'enviable' ideals they are often of light-skinned, thin or large bodies with 'good curves' without 'transgressive' rolling and moving fat, and with long or curly hair if not racially ambiguous (Brown & Jasper, 1993; Sharpley-Whiting: 2007; Shaw, 2005). As such, it is possible my participants may discuss coping skills and tools for remedying feelings of exclusion from dominant images of beauty.

Recognition of the coping and management mechanisms used by my participants throughout their lives can inform teachings designed for empowering girls and women both in and beyond educational institutions. In particular, documenting bullying, body-based harassment and discrimination based on size, weight, and race within the experiences of students and in workplaces can be beneficial. These women's narratives launch from significant interactions in and lessons learned from their girlhood and the effects these have had on their interpretation of their bodies as fat and Black women. And through their interactions in a variety of settings and circumstances, these women have learned, unlearned and relearned key messages about fatness, Blackness and womanhood that allow them to be.

Generally, fat women's bodies are framed as uncanny, excessive bodies literally bursting out of bounds (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001). Similar to the framing and narratives attached to Black bodies (Collins, 2009; Hooks, 1992; Luckett, 2018; Shaw, 2006), fat bodies are often framed as out of control, lazy, lacking power, self-determination and other personality traits associated with fatness (Saguy, 2013). Fatness, often marked as failed, unhealthy and immoral, is pervasively discredited and framed as grotesque and undesirable (Saguy, 2013). As such, adipose

bodies are often talked about, researched, evaluated, and ultimately pathologized clinically under the chronic rhetoric of the "obesity epidemic" while personal narratives and complex experiences of *living* while fat are underrepresented in literature. In response, fat acceptance, fat activist movements, and fat studies scholarship have attempted to resignify fat embodiment outside of stigma by critiquing attitudinal and systemic ideologies, practices, institutions, performance spaces, and medical discourse that dehumanize fat and fatness (Bacon, 2010; Bacon & Aphramor, 2011, 2014; Cooper, 2016; Ellison, 2013; Luckett, 2018; Mayer & Schoenfielder et al., 1995; Ellison, McPhail & Mitchinson, 2016; McPhail, 2017; Gailey, 2012, 2014; Gingras, 2006; Owen, 2008; 2012; Rothblum & Solovay, 2009; Tischner, 2013; Wann, 1998). These strides are invaluable. Fat Studies scholarship has centered the actual lives of fat people which is a large departure from the portrayal of fat persons in biomedical literature as objects and medical problems. Despite these positive strides within the literature, lived body stories of Black and fat women residing in Canada remain largely absent. My work which particularly centers these women, makes significant contributions to these gaps. My work also demonstrates how fat and Black bodies, historically two groups marked as diseased, abject bodies are able to 'dis/ease'[13], disrupt and queer dominant ideals through nonnormative embodiment.

Black women are not monolithic. We are not culturally immune from pursuits of thinness any more than we are unanimously all proud to be fat. Fatness and blackness, as discredited attributes on their own, suggest the ultimate fall from the Western beauty ideal. When *both* reside in the same body and in particular spaces and places, their similar outside status is compounded displacing them threefold (Mohanram, 1999). The effects of racism, misogyny,

[13] Dis/ease is a play on the word disease. I explain it as representing the subversive potential of social and culturally "diseased" bodies (i.e. those seen as grotesque, abject and outside of ideal bodyhood) to dis-ease (irritate/push back) and destabilize the status quo from which more expansive body diversities can be reimagined.

class oppression, and fat hate can be spirit crushing. This dissertation hopes to interrogate the intersecting subjectivities of fatness and Blackness. Fatness and gender have long been central to fat studies scholarship and my work further develops fat studies' intersectional inquiry by centering gender, body size and race. Participants' sexuality and intimate partnerships may also inform their body stories.

African diasporic literary and cultural studies scholar Andrea Shaw argues, fatness and blackness intersect in particularly evocative ways. "Eurocentric ideals of beauty have caused fatness and blackness to display an uncanny coincidence of boundaries as there are both physical attributes that immediately displace some women from the western beauty arena… fatness is an evocation of blackness because contemporary Western culture understands the fat body as denoting what the black body was always thought to signify: bodily indiscipline and rebellion" (Shaw, 2004: 143, 152; 2006). Similarly, LeBesco argues, "The stigma of fat clusters around the stigma of poverty and of non-whiteness with the effect of depriving individuals of their rights as citizens," (LeBesco, 2004: 63). Fatness and blackness, are political and material disruptions of dominant 'normalized' body ideals. I argue that fatness and blackness not only disrupt and dis-ease embodiments through their sheer visual difference but that this 'difference' signals a 'narrative of excess' skin where 'too much' fatness or 'too much' blackness figuratively and literally 'bursts through' and ruptures the 'status quo's' senses and margins. As visual culture scholar Nicole R Fleetwood argues in *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality and Blackness* (2011), "seeing Black is always a problem in a visual field that structures the troubling presence of blackness" (3). She continues to state that, "Blackness troubles vision in Western discourse. And the troubling effect of blackness becomes heightened when located on certain bodies marked as such" (6). Hence my argument in regards to the ability of bodies of excess – fat and

Black skin – to dis/ease and destabilize what I call hegemonic bodyhood – or the dominant scripts of how our bodies should look, live and operate within the world's dominant order.

Postcolonial theorist Yaba A. Blay extends the function of social capital through the body by arguing that skin exists as a commodity like a bartering tool to be exchanged for acceptance, love, popularity, social position and the like (Blay, 2009: 69). Blay asserts that beauty is a function of "global White supremacy" (Blay, 2009: 52; 2011). Beauty, according to Blay, is universally associated with White skin and features which includes thinness, Whiteness ideologies and hierarchal social capital, power and privilege. As such, beauty has tangible currency in the lives of darker-skinned racialized women globally (Blay, 2013). According to Blay, "Beauty, and the value placed upon it, is equivalent to the power that intelligence, money, and political influence hold for men. Thus, for women, beauty is power; and for Black women, light skin, inasmuch as it is equated with beauty, is power" (Blay, 2009: 52). Both fat and Black bodies, through historical and contemporary projects of alterity, have been exoticized and fetishized. These bodies have both rested at the paradox of asexual/over sexual, invisible/hyper-visible and, I argue, stereotypical binaries that portray the Black body as a jovial saint or barbaric menace. Through an exploration of my participants' body stories, this dissertation insists that fatness and Blackness are indeed feminist issues.

Recognizing critiques of second wave feminist exclusion of racialized women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1981), this dissertation destabilizes the assumption that white femininity is the point of departure in fat studies literature on fat women's lives. Fat studies scholarship is no stranger to documenting the negative impact of fat oppression on people's lives. However, geographically the bulk of fat studies' theoretical literature has been created in and focussed on the lives of women – predominantly white women – within the United

States and the United Kingdom (Cooper, 2012). My participant body stories provide a geographical and theoretical shift in that their life histories serve as sites for the development of new theories with the potential to directly impact how we document and theorize fat women's lives.

The specificity of my work illuminating the body stories of contemporary Black women in Toronto exclusively pushes the boundaries of the discipline even further and adds to the growing breadth of Canadian fat studies literature. My dissertation responds to the problem of Black body erasure. It responds to the urgent need to further complicate fat scholarship with Black women's narratives most of whom in my study identify as other than heterosexual. Black fat women living in Toronto ON Canada who have experienced moments of discrimination, exclusion and moments of resilience and triumph matter. This dissertation focuses on a small group of participants and as such is not concerned with making grand conclusions about all Black, fat women. Instead, it opens dialogue, inspires future research, and encourages readers to consider the current limitations of research on fat women's embodied experiences that do not include, or only marginally add, the voices of Black women. It creates a necessary shift in the dynamic of how the story is told. It is a timely subject of inquiry in its ability to assist fat studies, anti-racism, Black feminist, socio-cultural and sartorial scholars in Canada theorizing the experiences of Black women living in Toronto and the intersectional, embodied experience of living while fat and Black against varying everyday, systemic and socializing forces of oppression and liberation. Considering the influence of Black and anti-racist feminist theory on fat scholarship, the lack of substantial scholarship on women who are fat and Black is problematic (Farrell, 2011; Shaw, 2005, 2006).

Most scholarship on Black women's bodies is situated within the United States and primarily informed by Black Feminist Thought. My research also prioritizes the implications of anti-racist feminism. Sociologist and Canadian anti-racist feminist scholars Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson (1999) make a similar critique of the widespread application of Black feminist thought within a Canadian context. According to Dua and Robertson, Black feminist thought, coined primarily in the United States by American Black feminists theorizing on the interconnectedness of race, gender and class in analyzing oppression, is a very geographically specific framework that often has less resonance with women of colour within the Canadian experience (Dua & Robertson, 1999: 8-9) [14]. My participants, including myself as researcher, identify as Black, African, Caribbean or bi-racial women of colour and we do live in Toronto, which is a very multicultural city. Considering the future implications of my research, it is possible that taking into consideration Due and Robertson's analysis may allow for my research to find additional connections and inform future research on other groups of women of colour.

Dua and Robertson suggest that Canadian anti-racist feminist thought is more culturally and geographically relevant for theorizing racialized feminized experience in Canada (Dua & Robertson, 1999:9). Dua and Robertson suggest that anti-racist feminist thought recognizes that not all those who theorize on the interconnections of race, class and gender are women of colour and therefore anti-racist feminist thought is more inclusive of diverse ethno-cultural feminist voices. Therefore, they do not employ the label "Black feminist thought" in order to avoid essentialism, which could devalue the ultimate importance of the analysis of multiple oppressions. "Too often, both sympathetic and critical reviews of such bodies of work [Black

[14] I would argue that this is substantially different today with the wave of social media, online transmission of ideas and the so-called "re-emergence" or "renewed" awareness of anti-Black racism in Canada and accompanying resistances. As such, 'Black feminism' as a concept is one which more Black women in Canada are familiar with and embrace today.

feminist thought] assume that writers put forward their ideas because they are racialized and gendered beings" (Dua & Robertson, 1999:9). One position 'American' Black feminist and 'Canadian' anti-racist feminist scholars do agree on is that the lived histories, experiences, and knowledge of racialized women, and in particular to this dissertation Black women, have largely been overlooked by global White feminisms and sisterhoods which do not see race as a significant category of analysis (hooks, 1981, 1989, 1990; Dua & Robertson, 1999; Wane & Deliovsky, 2002; Massoquoi & Wane, 2007; Collins, 2009).

U.K fat activist and scholar Charlotte Cooper (2012) provides a similar critique within fat studies. According to Cooper, documented fat scholarship and fat activism suffers from an Americentric cultural imperialism (Cooper, 2012; 2016; Rothblum & Solovay, 2009: 328) whereby fat scholarship outside of America is often viewed as secondary. Cooper calls for an international scope in fat studies scholarship whereby fat studies can embrace a greater understanding of the multiple geographical locations of knowledge and its impact on fat studies. Cooper states, in the *Fat Studies Reader* (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009) "the lack of multicultural perspective [in fat studies] means that Fat Studies currently replicates and supports U.S. imperialism and reiterates tired models of western cultural dominance" (330).

This dissertation provides an opportunity to bring critical Black, anti-racist feminist, social constructionism, symbolic interactionist, sartorial and fat studies scholarship together while centering the experiences of Black women who live in Toronto. Although a relationship between fat studies and feminism may seem commonsensical this hasn't always been the case. Feminist scholarship and fat studies may share similar areas of interest: women's bodies and dominant discourses that operate to discipline and contain them predominantly (Bartky, 1990; 2006), but feminism has not always considered fat a *feminist issue*.

Gender studies scholar Amy E. Farrell in her text *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (2011) historicizes fatness and notions of citizenship and explores how the feminist movements of the late 19th early 20th century co-opted anti-fat messages and images to promote its own suffragette and second wave agenda by conflating thinness and whiteness with civilization and women's right to vote. I am aware of the exclusion of racialized, working class and queer women from first and second wave feminisms but prior to commencing this research was unaware of how White feminists at the turn of the 20th century specifically disavowed fatness in their campaigns. According to Farrell, some members from suffragists and anti-suffragists used images of fat bodies infused with racialized stereotypes such as those evoked by racist renderings of the "Hottentot Venus" to further their political agendas.

Black feminist, civil rights scholar and activist Angela Davis' *Women, Race & Class* (1981) critically addresses the systematic exclusion of working and African-American women during the suffrage movement. NAWSA (The National American Woman Suffrage Association), formed in 1890, went through great lengths to alienate Black women's participation in the vote. This nonetheless did not prevent Black women from organizing and creating Black labour groups, nor did it halt establishment of the Suffrage Department within the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Black women participated in awareness raising, education and advocating for their right to vote and according to Davis, Black women suffragists received the support of many Black men, most notably W.E.B. Dubois, in comparison to white woman suffragists who were routinely taunted by their white male counterparts (Davis, 1981: 145-146). Davis' account of Black women's participation in the women's rights movement is a comprehensive analysis, well before the popularity of the concept of 'intersectionality,' of flaws within white feminisms that still persist today.

First and second wave feminisms differ historically and both 'waves' provide insight on how fat was perceived. According to Farrell, suffragists portrayed images of thin, white, 'deserving' women voters and simultaneously called men who didn't support the movement greedy "fat cats" (Farrell, 2011: 97). "Rather than challenging the ideology of fat denigration, first wave feminists for the most part battled for their rights within that ideology, painting themselves as slim and fit for citizenship and drawing on fat stigma to humiliate the opposition" (Farrell, 2011: 113). The irony, Farrell suggests, is that fighting for women's equality encouraged the first wave to disassociate with 'fatness,' which was culturally seen as 'otherness,' which would become synonymous with inequality (Farrell, 2011: 115). Farrell claims second wave feminists were more critical of beauty culture while both contesting and accommodating it. By that point some second wave feminists and fat activists such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), which was then National Association to Aid Fat Americans, and the Fat Underground ("FU") had begun collaborative protests to raise awareness of the sociocultural, legal, and economic penalties of anti-fat stigma. Second wave feminists may have been more critical of beauty culture but this was arguably White women's beauty culture. Arguably, the conflation of femininity, Whiteness, thinness, civility and beauty functioned to secure white women as superior and to construct Black women as inferior. In Canada, although fatness was beginning to be taken up in the late 20th century there was not an intersectional approach to addressing fat stigma.

At least 15 fat activist groups were organized in Canada between 1979 and 2000. The first fat activist event in Canada took place in September 1978 at a therapy workshop called "The Forgotten Women: Fat Women Only" (Ellison, 2013: 57, 61). Canadian women, like their American counterparts, were critical of the fat denigration they had experienced via their

doctors, family, social interactions and campaigns. What was less relevant to fat critiques then and what is arguably still only now beginning to gain momentum in critical fat scholarship is scholarly documentation of the lives of fat women of colour – particularly Black women. Not only in scholarship have our voices been secondary, but also in the more popular, 'watered down' campaigns around body acceptance typically used by plus fashion advertisers and large chain plus fashion clothing companies. As such, my dissertation's purpose is to add to critical fat scholarship on fat women's lives. The purpose of this dissertation is to center the body stories of seven Black fat women residing in Toronto and to extend on the theoretical and practical knowledges in current fat studies scholarship as well as interdisciplinary sociological, Black feminist, anti-racist and sartorial literature on people's lived experience.

Significance of the Study/Project & Research Questions:

The core of this research is an exploration into the lives of seven Black women living in Toronto whose physical embodiment signifies both fatness and Blackness. Black and anti-racist feminist scholarship has critically demonstrated the need for centering race as a category of analysis for observing, documenting, and critiquing the impact of inequity, misrepresentation, and everyday and systemic oppression on racialized lives. Black and anti-racist feminist thought has been necessary since an overreliance on gender and the system of patriarchy as the most important oppression experienced by women has singlehandedly spoke for, and as, White women's experience, leaving Black and other women of colour's experience at the periphery. This is not to suggest that Black and racialized women are immune from patriarchy's hold. We are not. However, critical race feminisms call for the need to articulate the way in which

misogyny juxtaposed with our race and ethnic subjectivities are experienced differently. Fat Studies owes much of its theoretical and methodological insight to Black, anti-racist, critical race and feminist scholarship. As an interdisciplinary discipline, critical fat scholarship has worked towards debunking fat stigma through the centering of fat people's lives and the dismantling of fat frames that rely solely on dominant biomedical discourses on fatness as abomination. Both fat studies and critical feminist studies have made significant shifts in the way women, racialized women and fat women's lives are perceived and understood. However, Black, anti-racist feminist thought as a theoretical framework has not documented at length the explicit interplay of fatness on contemporary Black women's oppression,[15] nor has fat studies or fashion theory robustly interrogated the intersecting realities of fat women who are Black and negotiating their outer appearances (i.e. sartorial choices) among other negotiations.

By documenting these women's words, I record how these seven women make sense of their bodies through their engagements with family, social interactions in various real and digital spaces, personal style/dress, and as they live and move through systems that impact their lives such as racism, sexism and sizeism. My research purpose is to center these women's lives through my dissertation in a way that draws critically on their embodied experiences, the themes illuminated through their interviews that identify both similarities and differences in their experience, and the overall necessity of rendering fat Black women's body stories visibly important within Canadian scholarship. My research documents the threads that bind and inform

[15] Black feminist thought and anti-racist feminism has addressed the Black body and the impact of Eurocentric beauty ideals as part of an overall white supremacist project of colonialism. However, most of the focus has been on hair texture, skin tone, and other physical features i.e. size of buttocks, mouths and noses. There has been extensive analysis on the historical 'Mammy' - the fat, dark-skinned caricature created to further control the image of Black women as one of servitude, asexuality and joviality (Buchanan in Brown & Jasper, 1993; Collins, 2009; Hobson, 2005; hooks, 1992, 1995; 2003; 2005; McElya, 2007, McGee, 2005). It is my position that an extensive analysis of the intersecting experience of contemporary fat Black women has not been as extensively covered. Some exceptions include Andrea Shaw (2005. 2006, 2012) and UK-based Dr. Shirley Kate (2015).

their body stories. It also documents the abilities of my participants to both resist and accommodate dominant body ideals through their own bodies and the social, cultural and aesthetic choices they make as they negotiate daily in the skin they are in.

Research Question(s)

1. How do social interactions help inform fat, Black women's identity construction? What meanings and lessons are taken from these social interactions and how do they influence fat, Black women's everyday life experiences?
2. How might fat and Black embodiment for a small group of cisgender women influence their ability to access embodied currency?
3. How do self-identified fat Black women both accommodate and resist normalized body ideals? How might their 'putting themselves together' (i.e. sartorially 'well put together') through certain practices be strategic moves towards fitting in or disobediently *out* of particular settings?

Chapter Reviews

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework & Review of the Relevant Literature

In chapter two I provide an overview of the key theories informing this research project. The project is guided by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework which I argue best privileges the voices, lived and embodied experiences of my participants. My theoretical choices resonate with me as researcher and how I theorize bodies as involved in messy, non-linear and often conflicting processes of being and becoming through social interactions, our intersectional subjectivities and through the materiality of our lives. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on

the importance of critical approaches to women's bodies and how this furthers my scholarly inquiry.

Chapter 3 Methodology

In chapter three I make my argument for a qualitative methodological focus to the research project. Similar to my stance on the fluidity and spectrum of lived experience and bodies, I want to ensure my project provides space for my participants to respond fluidly and in their own way throughout my interview process. As such my interviews are unstructured influenced only by the participant consent form which provides broad strokes on the themes of the research projects. I also use general probes to help organize participants' body stories but there are no concrete interview questions asked to each participant in any predetermined order. My goal is to conduct qualitative feminist research. Beyond the actual interview moment, I also pay attention to the interview setting, researcher ethics and pre and post interview ethical responsibilities to my participants. I provide short participant profiles to conclude the chapter and I indicate that interviews will be thematically analyzed.

Chapter 4 Participant Body Stories & Reflections

In chapter four I document my participants' body stories in regards to living while Black, fat and a woman and the societal curriculum or the lived lessons they learn about acceptable and unacceptable bodies. Participant stories are additionally textured by their class, intimate relationships, workplace, school, family and public memories of body-based discrimination or celebration, fat-shaming and gender-based violence. What unfolds in these stories are the threads that bind, bound up and also release the tight grip of normative body ideals of whiteness and

thinness. These threads are largely constructed through participants' everyday engagement with others.

Chapter 5 Social Interactions and Social Forces

In chapter five the topics and themes discussed in chapter four are expanded on. Building on the 'threads' previously discussed, this chapter marries the stories with literature grounded in the study's interdisciplinary theoretical framework. These threads are largely constructed through participants' social interactions, the social forces and the objects such as their clothing that shape these interactions, their perceptions of themselves and their access to cultural and social currency. Social interactions with significant others such as family, colleagues and intimate others are explored as are the larger systemic systems of oppression the 'social forces' that dislocate and discredit Black, fat woman's bodies historically and contemporarily. The body stories of the participants' past weigh significantly on their lived experience and embodiment today.

Chapter 6 Buckin' the System: Accommodation, Resistance & (Ad)dressing Identity: Self-Valuation and Self-Definition

In chapter six I explore the individual and communal methods in which participants navigate the project of recovering themselves. From career choices, activisms to online blogs and advocacy their engagement involves accommodating the dominant ideals and in other cases it's the disavowal of social scripts all together and the reimagining of new(er) interventions and aspirations. Participants' sartorial (clothing) decisions emerge as a dominant method for aesthetic management and body policing but also for being fabulous and unabashed. Through their

resistance and resilience participants' threads communicate their experiences fitting in, fitting out and the emotional labour of the triple consciousness they contend with.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

To conclude the dissertation, I revisit the aims of the project. I reflect on the interview process, the methodology and the gains and challenges of the project. I then outline next steps for the project, its future impact on the lives of women and girls – especially Black women and girls and I end the dissertation as it began with a personal body story.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

This dissertation employs a hybrid theoretical framework or what I refer to as a 'theoretical bricolage' that is informed by an interdisciplinarity seeking to provide a critical anti-oppressive social inquiry on and documentation of the lived body stories of Black fat women in Toronto. These frameworks help me make sense of participant experiences and their interactions as potential sites of learning, unlearning, accommodation and resistance to dominant body ideals. My research is primarily framed through the lens of feminist standpoint theories - Black feminist thought, Canadian anti-racist feminist thought and intersectionality theory. It is additionally informed by the tenets of social constructionism, fat studies and fashion or sartorial studies. In this chapter, I review each of the theoretical frameworks, key principles and provide examples grounded in literature of how these frameworks compliment the dissertation's focus. Following the theoretical frameworks, I offer a critical reflection on the efficacy of critical approaches to women's bodies, how women's bodies are seen and sighted and how this further strengthens and informs my research.

An interdisciplinary, theoretical approach is critical to my understanding of, and approach to interpreting and documenting my participants' body stories. Together, these theoretical frameworks pay acute attention to the interlocking relations of decentralized power, dominant historical and contemporary discourses, everyday social interactions, and the symbols, exchanges and signifiers that impact our understanding of our selves, identities, bodies, and our abilities to resist, redefine, learn and unlearn the threads that bind and inform our body stories. These critical frameworks create space for analyzing how diverse sociocultural categories and

scripts overlap, intertwine, and compete with one another to create experiences, interpretations of those experiences, and subjectivities that are anything but neat and linear. Most significant to my research, these theoretical frameworks illuminate connections between participants' personal narratives and their sociocultural significance, both past (their childhood) and present (their adulthood), to participant knowledge. In seeking to open up the sites of connectivity, my research aims to lay bare the failings and potential for education's societal curriculum. In other words, theory is embedded in practice and informs how we think about what we know of ourselves. What these women have learned and unlearned through their lived experience and interactions, serves as hidden curriculum informing their body stories.

As C. Wright Mills proposed, the sociological imagination illustrates that our 'personal' identities, histories and problems are directly linked to the 'public' social, culture, and are therefore deeply political and multifaceted in meaning (Mills, 1959). These frameworks emphasize these connections and tensions and challenge the myth of private/public boundaries. They build on each other by proposing the notion of a co-constructed, interdependent, interconnected "self," an interacting and historically significant "self" as opposed to a unified, fixed neoliberal individualist approach to identity which compliments my postmodern, phenomenological understanding of bodies as "becoming," inter-relational and unfixed (Coleman, 2008; Rice, 2014). Such a nuanced and body reflexive interpretation of bodies is critical to my work in documenting and analyzing my participants' body stories as sites of resistance and agency as well as sites where unbalanced power dynamics contribute to experiences of inequity. My theoretical frameworks also inform my methodological choice of thematic analysis discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

Feminist Standpoint Theories & Intersectional Inquiry

Canadian anti-racist feminisms (Dua & Robertson, 1999; Wane & Deliovsky, 2002), Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1981; Lorde, 2007), feminist standpoint (Harding; 2004; Smith, 1987, 1990) and intersectionality theory (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, Lutz & Herrera et al., 2011, Valentine 2007) center the lived, complex and layered experiences of women and individuals. They offer a more nuanced starting point for researching and documenting the lives of marginalized members of society. By evaluating how historic and contemporary inquiry based on race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality for instance contribute to systemic and everyday oppression of Black and other women of colour, Black and anti-racism feminism standpoint theories are able to historicize experience in order to make tangible connections to the present.

Intersectional feminisms are necessary because despite feminist intentions to document and value women's experiences, as feminist theorist and cultural critic bell hooks suggests, newer articulations of feminism such as 'lifestyle feminism' (hooks, 2000) are problematic. Lifestyle feminism's underlying assumption that women, without any attachment to feminist principles, can be 'trendy' feminists in name only without fundamentally challenging and changing themselves, their beliefs, or working towards addressing the imbalances of power and oppressions against women in culture are counterproductive to feminist agendas. Women's voices have historically been minimized as insignificant, irrational and subordinate to the male canon of so-called indisputable, rational truth. Feminist standpoint theories provide an epistemology from which women-centered situated knowledges disrupt and dispute an overreliance on male ownership of life experience, expertise and, authority. While I draw much

of my feminist sensibilities from feminist standpoint theories, I am not oblivious to the debates, which critique feminist standpoint theory for its contribution to essentialism (Harding, 2004). There is no one "woman's perspective" or 'standpoint'' and postcolonial bodies of work have challenged this assumption by interrogating White feminist claims of 'universal sisterhood' and other colonial discourses that conflate gender with race, homogenize race, rank race-based discrimination as subordinate to gender inequality, or ignore race as a category of analysis altogether (Dua & Robertson, 1999; Hesse-Biber, 2011; hooks, 1981, 1989; McCann & Kim, 2017; Mohanty, 1988; Wane & Deliovsky et al., 2002; Wane & Massaquoi, 2007).

In Sandra Harding's edited collection, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies* (2004), standpoint theory is explained as an epistemology emerging in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power (2). Harding further asserts the potential of standpoint theory as a way of empowering oppressed groups through the valuing of their experience and the creation of what she notes authors in her collection such as Hill Collins (1989) have referred to as the development of an "oppositional consciousness" (2). "…It helps to produce oppositional and shared consciousness in oppressed groups – to create oppressed people as collective "subjects" of research rather than only as objects of others' observation, naming, and management…" (3). Feminist standpoint theory suggests that people who occupy marginalized positions in a culture require a "double perspective" – often as a matter of survival and that they subsequently understand the workings of both 'dominant' culture and their own marginal one (Kirsch, 1999: 14-15). Documenting and theorizing from the standpoints of the Black women interviewed in this dissertation is, to borrow from Harding's above title, both an 'intellectual and political' endeavour. My participants are not 'all knowing' of an entire

community and therefore cannot represent a monolithic voice for all Black women. This dissertation places a small group of women's body stories and their material conditions into Canada's literature on body image, Black women's experiences and fat embodiment. This work has future implications on the way in which policies, practices and curriculums in and outside of schooling institutions pertaining to bodies are understood and operationalized and will directly impact the lives of women and girls especially those for whom their intersecting subjectivities make experiences with fatness multifaceted.

Intersectionality[16] applied as an analytic tool (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) to critique the tendency to treat race and gender among other social locations as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis, examines how "power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing" (7). It analyses how systems of oppression, or major axes of social divisions in any given society, such as racism, sexism, classism, fat phobia, and homophobia converge, intersect, augment, work with and complicate one another to influence lived experience. For example, some intersectionality theorists, like some fat studies theorists, "realize that weight needs to be examined within the context of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation" (Rothblum, 2012: 4). Dismantling another myth of the universality of feminism for all women, critical race and intersectionality theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw[17] relates intersectionality to the history of feminist theory and its applicability to Black women. Crenshaw (1989) argues the value of feminist theory to Black women is diminished because it evolves from a white racial context that is seldom acknowledged. Not only are women of colour overlooked

[16] In Jennifer C. Nash's article 'Re-Thinking Intersectionality' (2008), Nash outlines the vast contributions of intersectionality including destabilizing the gender race binary and providing a vocabulary to respond to critiques of identity politics. However, Nash also identifies four tensions within intersectionality scholarship: the lack of a defined intersectional methodology; the use of Black women as quintessential intersectional subjects; the vague definition of intersectionality; and the empirical validity of intersectionality.

[17] Legal scholar Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. It underscores the 'multidimensionality' of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989: 139).

but their exclusion is reinforced when white women speak for and as all women. When feminist theory attempts to describe women's experience through analyzing patriarchy, sexuality, or separate-spheres ideology, it often overlooks the role of race. Similarly, I argue the value of fat studies scholarship, without the voices of Black along with other women of colour, diminishes. It is not enough to critique biomedical discourses of fat bodies as broken, sick, unhealthy, dangerous and unbound. Fat studies literature must demand an intersectional analysis of the complicated meanings of fat when viewed through the lens of race and other multifaceted social locations such as disability since both race and disability are often constructed in similar transgressive frames of otherness, as tactics of marginalization.

Critical disability theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concept of 'misfitting' is additionally helpful for understanding the messiness, othering, and temporality of identities. Misfitting, Garland-Thomson (2011) explains, presents an additional model to rethink disability outside of the traditional models of the "medical" and the "social" body. Rather than being duped by seductive neat binaries, Garland-Thomson suggests misfitting as a way to signify the intricate, complex, and ongoing tensions between fitting into one setting (or identity) in a particular place, space or time while experiencing the effect of a discredited, marginalized identity in the next. Misfitting is a particularly useful concept considering the way in which disability has been historically constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance. Disabled bodies are constructed as a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity instead of paying rightful attention to the real social insufficiencies: the inequalities, inaccessibility, negative attitudes, misrepresentations and institutional practices that result from the process of stigmatizing disability[18]. The body stories of

[18] In, *The Politics of Size: Perspectives from the Fat Acceptance Movement* (2015) fat activist Ragen Chastain explains that feminist disability studies view the construction of disability not as a personal pathology but as a

my seven participants may be informed by the intersecting and complex understandings of identity afforded through an application of the borrowed concept of misfitting and the ways in which their fatness, Blackness and gender, may be read in multiple ways based on their particular social interactions, the way they elect to adorn their bodies for instance and how those adornments or lack thereof are symbolically read against their fat, Black woman bodies by themselves and others. This research seeks to describe ways in which participant fatness, Blackness and their other embodiments read as symbols or material narratives of embodied 'excess' may work to inform their body perception, performance and management within the communities my participants identify as valuable to their representation of themselves, their construction of their identities, and the meanings certain social interactions may have for them. As such, symbolic interactionism and stigma theory may be useful to my understanding of participant body stories.

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category similar to race, class and gender that is informed by social, cultural and historical influences (87). As such, she argues it inaccurate to conflate fatness with disability since fat bodies are not on their own disabled bodies. "Fat bodies 'become' disabled when the material realities do not meet the needs of fat people to allow access to public spaces and places" (87). For Chastain material and consumer conditions 'disable' fat bodies. Fat bodies are not inherently disabled. Lauren E. Jones' (2012*) 'The Framing of Fat: Narratives of Health and Disability in Fat Discrimination Litigation'* discusses fat able-bodied plaintiff's use of disability legislation to sue for fat discrimination in education, the workplace and healthcare. Jones describes the slippery slope and the potential undermining that can happen when fat able-bodied persons, in attempts to free themselves of stereotypes associated with fat bodies essentially throw fat 'unhealthy' and disabled people 'under the bus', to differentiate themselves from the 'bad' fat bodies. She demands that fat plaintiffs, activists and the disability rights movements must work together with mutual respect otherwise fat plaintiffs who play into the 'healthy/unhealthy' paradigm may create dangerous precedents harmful to both fat and disabled bodies. Herndon's *Disparate but Disabled Fat Embodiment and Disability Studies* (2002) traces the medicalization of fatness and disability. Herndon dislodges fatness and disability from medical pathology and instead locates them within cultural and political contexts demonstrating why 'medical rubrics' (120) cannot adequately account for the stigma associated with fat and/or disabled embodiment. The debates on conflation and comparisons of fatness with disability and vice versa through bio-medical/biopolitical and other models of health and rights legislation are well documented (Kirkland, 2008, 2015; Satinsky & Ingraham, 2014).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism (SI), first coined by sociologist Herbert Blumer (Sandstrom and Lively et al. 2014; Blumer, 1969), has three specific premises: a) human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them in their everyday encounters in daily life (i.e. the meaning of the chair, of fat or of a particular item of clothing), b) that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with another, and c) that these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things they encounter (Blumer, 1969: 2-3). As indicated earlier, social and cultural capital is gained and lost through bodies and the way in which they are perceived and acted upon. Meaning is socially constructed and negotiated through interactions. According to cultural and fashion theorist Efrat Tseëlon, "Symbolic interactionism is a micro-sociological theory that views people as acting towards things based on the meaning those things have for them. These meanings are derived from social interaction" (Tseëlon, 2016: 155).

In reference to social constructionist Erving Goffman's *Theories of Social Roles* (1959), particular social occasions and settings call for the mobilization of certain aspects of self. According to Goffman (1959; 1974), bodies play an important role in mediating the relationship between people's self-identity and their social identity. The social meanings, which are attached to particular bodily forms and performances, tend to become internalized and exert a powerful influence on an individual's sense of self, feelings, and inner worth (Shilling, 2012: 73). When bodies do not 'measure up' to others' expectations for any number of reasons the stigmatized individual often internalizes a peripheral identity which is then seen as a spoiled self-identity (Goffman, 1963). As relevant as Goffman's stigma theory is, it places an unbalanced amount of

attention on how we manage our impressions in order to maintain hegemony. This imbalance, I argue, may miss the potential of those, who either cannot hide their supposed 'alterity' of fatness and/or Blackness, or those who proudly flaunt it. Another observation of social constructivist theory is its emphasis on how the body is constructed by as opposed to how the body constructs or resists normalized constructs.

While Goffman doesn't single out fashion and personal appearance as a topic exclusively (Rocamora & Smelik, 2016), he referred to clothing as part of the elements that constitute the 'personal front' of the actor; these include insignia of office or rank, racial characteristics, size and looks, or body language (1959: 23-24). In *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life* (Tseëlon, 1995), a self-described homage to Goffman, Tseëlon created the wardrobe approach. Tseëlon's wardrobe approach studied the meaning of clothing and the reasons for choosing which clothes to wear and when from the perspective of the wearer. According to Tseëlon, Goffman's distinctions between actors, types of audiences and types of situational rules was useful to her social and symbolic interactionist study because she was able to account for opinions and practices relating to how and why her participants selected their attire and what meanings the clothes had for them (1995) in relation to the audience and situation they were in. As such, Tseëlon application of Goffman's concepts of 'encounters' and 'social occasions' may be applicable to the self-fashioning decisions of some to monitor public image by accommodating socially acceptable dress codes related to size, race or gender. It is also possible to resist certain social scripts through clothing choices especially juxtaposed against symbolic, social and cultural meanings of fat and fatness as anything but fashionable or socially acceptable.

Fat Studies Scholarship

Study results show that a significant percentage of respondents would rather give up a year of life (46%), be divorced (30%), or be unable to have children (25%) than be "obese" (Schwartz, Vartanian et al., 2006). Another survey revealed that 54% of women between the ages of 18 and 25 would rather be hit by a truck than be fat (Martin, 2007). Fat people, especially fat cisgender women, are routinely more afraid than non-fat people to visit doctors, which is due to fat stigma and negative treatment many fat people experience from health providers, who from a neoliberal perspective, routinely withhold medical treatment from fat patients until forced weight loss occurs (Lee & Pausé, 2016) and read fat bodies upon first sight as morally bankrupt and deserving of blame for their own health ailments (Lee & Pausé, 2016). According to the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale University, over 50% of doctors felt fat patients were awkward, ugly, weak-willed and unlikely to comply with treatment; over 24% of nurses said they were repulsed by "obese" patients; over 30% of teachers said being obese is the "worst thing that can happen to someone," and over 70% of people said they had been ridiculed by significant others in their lives because of their body size. With menacing statistics and documented experiences like these it is imperative that fat studies scholarship provide a counter narrative which humanizes fat people and situates fat discrimination as an urgent human rights issue. The term "obesity" refers to the way fat is medicalized and pathologized in medical and popular discourse. This term constructs adiposity as an illness, something that needs to be 'cast off' in order to save life and live productively in society. An "obese" individual is over the age of 18 with a Body Mass Index (BMI) above 30. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by the square of their height in metres (BMI = kg/m^2). Although it has been proven

that the BMI does not accurately account for differential musculature or bone mass among individuals and across ethno-cultural groups (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011: 4), it still remains a central tool used to construct the label of obesity, which facilitates environments where fat stigma flourishes unchecked.

Anthropologists Don Kulick & Anne Meneley make the case in their book *Fat the Anthropology of an Obsession* (2005) that there are no obvious, natural or universal responses to fat although anti-fat obesity discourse would suggest otherwise. In their anthology, they explore the many dimensions of fat: fat as substance, as food, a condition, a language, an aesthetic, and even as a matrix of erotic possibility (Kulick & Meneley, 2005: 4). Kulick and Meneley, like Gilman (2008), argue that fat is socially constructed and imbued with historicized cultural meanings and that by putting fat in a broad, cross-cultural perspective across time it is proven that fat is anything but the straightforwardly bad thing that it is usually presented as. To the contrary: fat is often a positively valued substance (Kulick & Meneley, 2005: 6).

According to fat studies scholar Esther D. Rothblum (2012), fat studies as an interdisciplinary field of scholarship, provides a theoretical framework that critically examines societal attitudes about body weight and appearance. It advocates equality for all people with respect to body size. Fat studies scholarship seeks to remove the negative associations such as the label of failed citizenship (Rinaldi, Rice et al., 2017) that society has about fat and fat bodies. Though critical fat scholarship is a relatively recent academic area of study, fat activism and fat studies principles have a history dating back to the 1960s in the United States (Cooper, 2010) 1970s in Canada (Ellison, 2013) and more recently Deborah McPhail's *Contours of a Nation: Making Obesity and Imaging Canada*, 1945-1970 (2017) which historicizes fat and describes how certain marginalized bodies representing particular populations were constructed as 'obese'

and suffering from ‘obesity’ in order to separate “real” Canadians from others and the consuming moral and health implications of that labelling. Fat Studies regards weight, like height, as a human characteristic that varies widely across any population (Polivy & Herman, 1983:191-192; Rothblum, 2012: 4). It contests the dominant anti-fat rhetoric which is largely disseminated through the biomedical industrial complex. Furthermore, it dislodges the construction of choice which is often used to suggest that fat bodies can easily ‘chose’ to become thin bodies. While fat may be mutable temporarily, extensive research has demonstrated that our fat bodies are, for the most part, immutable (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014). Neither surgical nor personal behaviour modification such as excessive dieting or exercise are guaranteed interventions for shifting our body weight, shape, size or *fat stigma* at that. However, fat is normalized as mutable and therefore fat people have “chosen” a spoiled identity deserving of condemnation.

There are three key problems with choice: the focus on the mental versus the physical, individual vs the social and, the centralizing of power (Chambers, 2008). These liberal ideologies ignore that power and injustice reside in the physical everyday. Furthermore, centralizing the “individual” assumes our immunity from social determinants, cushioned within systems of oppression, that help shape our “choices” and our bodies as either “in” or excluded. Lastly, power exists everywhere and in so even without the state eye, people perform its goals. The 2016 summary from the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (PCA/ACA) provides a comprehensive understanding of fat studies scholarship as an interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary field of study that confronts and critiques cultural constraints against notions of “fatness” and “the fat body”:

Fat Studies explores cross cultural or global meanings of fatness and fat bodies. It investigates cultural, historical, inter/intrapersonal, or philosophical meanings of fat and fat bodies. Fat studies documents the geography and lived experiences of fatness and fat bodies as they live in, are shaped by, and remake the world. It creates paradigms for the development of fat acceptance or celebration within mass culture.

Fat Studies uses body size as the starting point for a wide-ranging theorization and explication of how societies and cultures, past and present, have conceptualized all bodies, and the political/cultural meanings ascribed to bodies. Fat Studies argues that all bodies are inscribed with the fears and hopes of the particular culture they reside in, and these emotions often are mislabeled as objective "facts" of health and biology. More importantly, perhaps, Fat Studies insists on the recognition that fat identity can be as fundamental and world-shaping as other identity constructs analyzed within the academy and represented in media.

In other words, fat is a social and political identity category as is race, gender, class, age, dis/ability, ethnicity, sexuality and other identity categories – whose characteristics have sometimes been used to justify discrimination and oppressions. It is a category of identity that is often paired with one or more of the other identity categories to multiply justifications for abuse. Topics explored by fat studies scholars interested in popular culture studies may include but are not limited to: representations and images of fat people in literature, periodicals, fashion, journalism, social media, film, theater, music, nonfiction, and/or of the visual arts including advertising and more.

The emphasis on an individual's free choice and subsequent responsibility in all matters of life, including health, is a characteristic of contemporary neoliberal societies and healthism[19] discourse, and also contributes to the discrimination and oppression of fat individuals (Tischner, 2013: 20; Lee & Pausé, 2016). The need for fat studies scholarship is critical to say the least. Particularly as statistics on "obesity" create climates where fat bodies, especially feminized bodies across the gender spectrum, are portrayed as unhealthy, asexual, underachieving, and 'lesser than' their thinner counterparts. Reports in the United States, Canada and Australia have each claimed that their country is the fattest in the world or warned that each is at imminent risk of becoming so (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009). On the 'prevalence' of fat in Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information state that over 1 in four Canadian adults are "obese," according to measured height and weight data from 2007-2009 (2011). These 'fears' of fatness stem largely from the World Health Organization's (WHO) presentation of "obesity" as an issue of global concern. In fact, WHO has coined "globesity" as a way of expressing the notion that everyone everywhere is at risk of this "global epidemic" (WHO, 2006). This 'fear epidemic' I argue creates a climate where thinness or at least the promotion of thinness *by any means necessary* — including celebrating cancer survivors for enviable weight loss without exercise[20] — becomes par for the course. With fear of fat comes the rationale for the criminalizing of fat bodies by juries or in jury selection (Beety, 2013; O'Grady, 2011), overtaxing fat people for beverages through erroneous 'fat taxes' (Bogenschneider, 2017;

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[19] A 'healthist' is one who supports healthism and assumes thinness and exercise automatically produces healthy bodies. By default, fat bodies can never be healthy. For more on Healthism review: "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life" by Robert Crawford (1980)
First Published July 1, 1980; Eller, G. M. "On Fat Oppression." *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, vol. 24 no. 3, 2014, pp. 219-245. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/ken.2014.0026; Watkins, Patti Lou. "Fat Studies 101: Learning to Have Your Cake and Eat It Too." *M/C Journal* [Online], 18.3 (2015): n. page.

[20] In April 2017, Cosmopolitan Magazine congratulated a woman who had survived many health crises by highlighting the fact that she had lost weight, 44 lbs, – without exercise. The magazine credited her weight loss to dieting. Cosmo was quickly criticized online for their misappropriation of "body positivity."

Doucett, 2015; Leicester & Windmeijer, 2004) and the overall governmentality of the body further compounded through ageism and racism (Twigg, 2013; Tate; 2018).

Canada participates directly in perpetuating anti-fat discourse through various weight-centered "anti-obesity" public health policies and programs that focus exclusively on weight loss as the only means for attaining healthy living. An example of such programming is Canada's *ParticipACTION* launched in 1973 and then re-launched in 2007 by the federal government of Canada (Ellison, 2013; Ellison, McPhail et al., 2016). Both iterations of the campaign suggest that without physical activity the consequence is obesity.[21] And through advertising images of fat children on motorized wheelchairs and fat children talking about heart disease the anti-fat narrative solidifies the myth that "obese" people are physically inactive and their size causes health problems (Ellison, 2013: 56). Canadian media activist Shari Graydon's youth friendly publication *Made You Look: How Advertising Works and Why You Should Know* (2003), and Naomi Klein's international bestseller *No Logo* (2009) provide comprehensive arguments on the power of advertising images and branding's impact on individuals and the creation of socio-cultural and economic ideologies that manifest in how people feel about their bodies and how they presume others may read their corporeality.

Conveniently none of these *ParticipACTION* campaigns focus on the bullying, social stigma, and infractions against human rights that many fat people endure through the words and actions of 'well meaning,' anti-fat preaching people who think they can sum up the efficacy of a fat person's entire life by judging their waistline. Health researchers Lily O'Hara and Jane Gregg

[21] As part of the Ontario Government's *Healthy Menu Choices Act*, https://www.ontario.ca/page/calories-menus beginning January 1, 2017 all food-service chains with 20 or more locations in Ontario were mandated to post the number of calories in all food and drink items sold – including water. There has been ample debate regarding this law and its encouragement of obsessive calorie-counting which contributes to eating disorders and ongoing body dissatisfaction (Sobal, 1999; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017).

critique the weight-centered health paradigm through the lens of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reveal the human rights infringements of anti-fat, weight-centered discourse in policy and programming (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012). The messages explicit in the weight-centered public health policies and programs result in violations of at least thirteen of the thirty human rights articles listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012: 43). For example, Article 5: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment," (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012: 39) is ignored as anti-fat sentiment is institutionalized and sanctioned in schools where bullying based on weight, size, shape and skin tone is largely ignored or naturalized as 'innocent play' (Andrew & Hannah, 2012) and arguably a similar 'consumer bullying' where fat bodies are excluded from luxury brands refusing to dress fat bodies even fat celebrities who are significant social media influencers. Article 5 does not recognize fat people who are discriminated in the workplace on the basis of their size, weight and shape (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009; Solovay; 2000; Nowrouzi, McDougall et al., 2015; Haywood, 2017) or pressured into participating in 'team building' workplace activities like weight loss challenges. Fat employees are routinely rated lower than their non-fat counterparts and receive lower hiring recommendations on average when evaluated for companies with health promotion programs (Powroznik, 2016). Canada is one of the countries that have signed the International Bill of Human Rights treaties yet our weight-centered programming that explicitly and implicitly focuses on people's weight may be breaching these legal and ethical human rights obligations. O'Hara & Gregg urge a move away from weight-centered health paradigms towards more proactive mechanisms consistent with a human rights approach to health such as the Health at Every Size (HAES) paradigm (O'Hara & Gregg, 2012: 43).

The HAES paradigm asserts that weight loss is not required for health improvement, and that a salutogenic lifestyle benefits individuals of any size (Tischner, 2013: 15). A salutogenic model of understanding health, developed by medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky, is a departure from the medical pathology model in that it focuses on the interconnectivity of health, environmental stress and coping mechanisms (Antonovksy, 1979) as opposed to a more traditional medical pathology model. According to HAES scholars and nutritionists Linda Bacon and Lucy Aphramor, HAES encourages: a) body acceptance as opposed to weight loss or weight maintenance, b) reliance on internal regulatory processes, such as hunger and satiety, as opposed to encouraging cognitively imposed dietary restriction, and c) active embodiment doing the things you love as opposed to encouraging only structured exercise (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011: 6). Above all HAES debunks the assumption that fatness equals death and illustrates through scientific research that in fact the yo-yo dieting cycle of weight loss has a higher mortality risk than fatness (Bacon, 2010). HAES has exceptional traction within the fat activist community and is well documented in the United States however it is not without critique.[22] Canada also has roots in HAES scholarship Canadian critical registered dietician Jacqui Gingras, provides a selective documentation of Canada's HAES movement in her article, "Throwing Their Weight Around: Canadians Take on Health at Every Size" (2006). Gingras' key figures include founding Canadian theorists of HAES Janet Polivy, co-author of the 1983 seminal book *Breaking the Diet*

[22] HAES has been critiqued for its naturalist language. Sociologist Deborah Lupton (2012) has challenged language utilized by Linda Bacon, scientist and founder of the HAES philosophy, as being supportive of a mind/body Cartesian dualism through HAES' description of the body as 'your body' as though it's separate from the 'you.' For Lupton, Bacon's referral to the body's 'natural' set-point suggests the body has a specific and stable origin. As Lupton argues, "references to 'turning over control to your body' assumes that the body is a natural entity that has its own wisdom independent of where it is sited (or situated) and what experiences it has gone through" (Lupton, 2012). Lupton also challenges the assumption of 'internal ques' of hunger and instead argues that through the sociology of the body and the sociology of food and eating (Lupton, 1996), motivations are never purely 'internal'. They are always culturally and socially situated within our lived experience and the negotiations and interactions we are consistently engaged in (Lupton, 1996; Shilling,2003, 2012).

Habit, co-authored with Peter Herman, and Gail Marchessault (2004) who has researched on body shape perceptions of Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Carla Rice, who co-founded *Hersize* a weight prejudice action group in Toronto (1988), Helena Spring, founder of the Canadian Association of Size Acceptance (CASA), Jennifer Branson, former president of the Canadian chapter of the International Size Acceptance Association, and Linda Omichinski, a registered dietician, who created the non-diet HUGS program in 1987 when she realized promoting weight loss was not beneficial to her clients, are noted by Gingras as significant to Canadian HAES development. Omichinski's book *You Count, Calories Don't* (1999) has had global recognition due to its holistic health paradigm as opposed to a weight-centered approach (Gingras, 2006). Nutritionist practitioners who have adopted the HAES philosophy do so by incorporating feminist, weight-neutral and anti-oppression strategies in their understanding of food, weight and nutrition outside of the traditional scientific rigidity of their professional training.

Significantly, most of these organizations were created by, for and with White women in mind. As Ellison documents in her research on fat women's organizations (FWOs) in Canada between the late 1970s and 2000, members organized around, and made sense of weight discrimination, fat oppression and weight preoccupation primarily from a White vantage point (Ellison, 2013: 61). In Canada, activists were primarily White, working- and middle-class women born between 1940 and 1960 (Ellison, 2013: 61). Similar to Crenshaw's and hooks' (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1981, 1989) argument on the invisibility of race within [White] feminist movements, Canadian fat women's organizations saw fat as the central unifying characteristic of their group and believed they shared common experiences with all women who identified as fat regardless of their ethnic or class background. Furthermore, Ellison notes that

upon interview, most fat women's organization (FWO) members never realized the Whiteness of their groups (Ellison, 2013: 61). This unawareness of whiteness is reminiscent of the seminal article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (1989) by critical race feminist Peggy McIntosh. In this article, McIntosh recites dozens of everyday and institutional privileges she has access to courtesy of her skin colour privilege. McIntosh explains these as white privileges that many White people may not even consciously realize they have access to. I would argue that one of these privileges is being able to walk into spaces such as size acceptance organizations or to coordinate such a space without realizing the dominant racial makeup of members. Without considering how race and size oppression may differ or intersect with one another, regardless of whether or not there is racial 'diversity' in the room, it is impossible to create a nuanced 'lipoliteracy' (Graham, 2005: 169) or 'reading' of fatness and fat experiences (Shaw, 2005; 2012).

Dr. Sharrell D. Luckett, a performance, black, fat studies interdisciplinary artist scholar chronicles her life as a Black, fat "transweight"[23] woman. 'Blackgirlwoman' and the readings of her body on stage in *Young, Gifted and Fat: An Autoethnography of Size, Sexuality & Privilege* (2018). In her scholarship, Madison (1993) and Moraga & Anzaldúa (1981) all three scholars address 'theories of the flesh' and 'theories of/in the flesh' respectively as a way of theorizing the "physical realities of our lives, our skin colour, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings, all fused to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981: 23). Luckett identifies the need for collaborative efforts between Black feminist thought,

[23] Luckett describes herself as a "transweight Black female" (2014). Luckett describes 'trans' as being attached to various identity markers to signify crossing from one state or location to another. She employs transweight as a term to identify someone who willfully acquires a new size identity by losing or gaining a large amount of weight in a short period of time (she suggests six months to a year as her example of duration). Luckett has had fluctuating weight for years and is invested in placing weighty conversations especially about Black women's bodies as she sees the invisibility of Black artists body as sites of analysis in fat studies.

performance studies and fat studies to analyze the negotiations of fat, Black bodies using her own embodiedness and difficult navigations as her immediate site for analysis. For Madison (1993) theories of the flesh – Black, fat 'excess' flesh I've argued, encompasses the strategies of social engagement that establish spaces of possibility and transformation. According to Madison, theories of the flesh "reject the distinctive interpretations of the world carved out of the material realities of a group's life experience" (213). For my research the role of clothing - *trying on* and negotiating identity as fat and Black women is crucial.

Thinking Through Fashion: Fashion (Sartorial) Theory

This dissertation considers the role of fashion[24] in identifying acceptable and unacceptable bodies, reinforcing corporeal socially constructed respectability and the role of fashion as a tool of resistance, self-definition and self-valuation. Our fashion[25] choices, clothing practices and overall personal style or aesthetic language are material and performative manifestations of our ever-evolving identity constructions (Davis, 1992). Clothing selection and dress is part of our socialization process. Dress is a daily social situated and embodied practice (Barnard, 2002; Entwistle, 2000, 2015; Rocamora & Smelik, 2016) and as such is an integral part of how individuals prepare to engage in the outside world through sartorially nuanced performances of their gender (Butler, 1990, 1999, Barry, 2016a, 2016b), race (Ford, 2015; Muñoz, 2006; Miller, 2009), age (Twigg, 2010; 2013; 2017), class (McDermott & Pettijohn,

[24] The interdisciplinary field of fashion studies, like fat studies, has also experienced much resistance from outside fields of study because as interdisciplinary disciplines they have both been devalued and 'feminized' in academia. As fashion scholar Julia Twigg explains in *Fashion, the Body and Age* (2013), "Fashion and dress have long been culturally constituted as feminized areas, their discourses predominantly embodied in the lives of women" (79). However, with the proliferation of both fat studies and fashion studies as significant conceptual areas of study across a multitude of disciplines these presumptions are shifting.

[25] Fashion has many divergent definitions as such there is no one all encompassing meaning. For the purpose of this project "fashion" can be understood as the "most admired style in clothes and bodily adornments," (Venkatesh, Joy et al., 2010: 460). By implication it is the "cultural construction of the embodied identity" (Steele, 2004).

2011; Mohamed, 2011) and fatness (Andrew, 2015; Connell, 2013; Czerniawski, 2015) based on the communicative power of fashion (Behnke, 2017; Davis, 1992; Lurie, 1981). As Lurie (1981) says, "For thousands of years human beings have communicated with one another first in the language of dress" (3). As I mentioned earlier with lipoliteracy – the reading of fat – fashion studies in this project serves to offer a potential 'reading' of the sartorial choices of my participants. Clothing as such is also a form of literacy and is subject, as we are, to the many societal curriculums around us.

Entwistle's original claim that dress is a 'situated bodily practice' aims to bring the totality of the dressed body into social analysis (2015: xi). In *The Fashioned Body: Fashion Dress & Modern Social Theory* (2015), Entwistle describes the way in which literature on the body has so far almost entirely ignored fashion and vice versa. Entwistle explains that, "the idea of fashion/dress as situated bodily practice acknowledges a very basic sociological tension between structure and agency: structures such as the fashion system impose parameters around dress; however, within these constraints, individuals can be creative in their interpretations of fashion and their practices of dress" (40). This creativity is crucial to theorizing dress as a form of resistance. Though the panopticon's impact is real so is one's ability to have agency. Of course, there are limits to the creative freedoms and interpretations available for certain bodies – especially those that have economic barriers, are gender non-conforming, fat or racialized for instance where what one *doesn't* wear can say just as much if not more than what they do wear. As such fashion is deeply situated within the cultural and social laurels of the time and therefore sartorial choices cannot be separated from lived experience. As Fiona Blaikie explains in "The Aesthetics of Female Scholarship: Rebecca, Kris, Paula and Lisette" (2007), a visual and textual study into the aesthetic choices and meanings of the "clothed/disciplined/transgressing" (1)

bodies of female scholars, clothing can make visible aspects of how identity is embodied, lived and re/presented. Blaikie states, "…Creating a personal visual identity through aesthetic choices in clothing provides a metaphorical connection to a particular individual's socioeconomic, aesthetic and political relationships to and with the world and with fellow human beings," (2).

Fashioning and *fashioned* bodies help to orchestrate our interactions with people, places, objects and gain access to resources and spaces in our everyday lives (Woodward, 2007). It also aids in the construction of categories – real and imagined – that can have significant impact on the individual as they move through the world. The choices we make are often read as elaborate cultural symbols and narratives of our race, gender and body image among other intersecting realities and identities. Beyond signifiers of one's perception of reality, clothing can also be used to signal an *aspirational* raced and classed identity as well as serving as a materialized act of resistance against dominant gender identity and expression norms (Mohamed, 2011; Blake, 2018). Clothing as a fashion symbol imbued with meaning and significance are further activated through our interactions with others and their readings of us and these symbols. From an intersectional lens, fashion has been critiqued for its extensive history of exclusion, cultural appropriation, gender binarism, racism and, particularly relevant to my project, fat phobia as expressed by bodies across the gender spectrum but especially fat feminized and women-identified bodies.

When fat women are generally excluded in the fashion industry or some fat Black women receive messages about what colours look best on their darker skin and are as such warned to omit certain bright colours from their wardrobes or cosmetics in order to be 'appropriately dressed,' this limits access to that socializing and bonding experience. Lack of large size, fashionable and contemporary clothing items can be argued as a material barrier limiting some

bodies' full ability to create the 'front stage' (Goffman, 1959) appearances people are able to present to the public world. It further creates barriers in how we negotiate, present and perform our impression management to significant and generalized others in our lives. Many fat women engage in DIY (Do It Yourself) projects and actively make the fashions they wish to wear due to the lack of diverse, fashionable sizes in the marketplace (Abellar, 2015; Andrew, 2015). For many fat women who create their own fashions, their fashion is reimagined as a vehicle for their liberation away from stifling raced, gendered and sized boundaries even though having to 'fashion' the fat body is arguably still playing into the capitalist game of what I refer to as the 'economizing of bodies.'

Fashion, dress and aging scholar Julia Twigg discusses the function of fashion and dress as part of the wider process of governmentality of the body. According to Twigg, older bodies are increasingly subject to aspirational disciplinary demands regarding appearance such as the need to look younger, exercise to stay fit and to participate in patterns of fashion consumption as a sign of their successful mastery of what Twigg refers to as "moving younger"[26] (2013: 82). However, ask Twigg warns, while there is a benefit to popular images embracing the idea of the stylish senior who has an eye for fashion, this spread of fashionability to older women also imposes new demands and new requirements that older women be more fashionable otherwise they aren't performing 'good' old age well. This fashion consumption critique can be applied to fat bodies as well and the girdle in the quest of tightly synched waistlines is an example of the

[26] 'Moving younger' is the concept Twigg uses to refer to those currently in their fifties and sixties - baby boomers who are often presented as a pioneer generation accustomed to the consumption boom of the 1980s and 1990s and are no strangers to contemporary dress that's seen as 'younger' and more 'vital.' Those who do not 'move younger' don't perform old age 'well' and instead ignore aesthetic rules and expectations of looking younger and fashionable at all costs. This is easily related to Stacy Bias (2014) and the good vs bad fatty archetypes. The good fat body engages in elaborate dress codes – arguably including shape wear to 'tame' and flatter fat. The bad fat body often challenges such inventions. Though I'd argue the binary isn't as black and white or as siloed as one might think. Resistance and accommodation exist on an unfixed swinging pendulum.

physical manifestation of governmentality of the body in that it is literally and figuratively a rigid reminder of the limiting preferably small(er) space in which women and feminized bodies are expected to occupy. The measurements of the Barbie doll, although the unrealistic nature of her measurements have been called into question consistently, still remains an iconographic beauty 'symbol' as the antithesis to 'ugly' for many.

In 1997 the Danish dance-pop group *Aqua* had a hit song *Barbie Girl*. The line from the chorus, "*I'm a Barbie girl in a Barbie world,*" became an international anthem. Barbie, also synonymous with fashion, heteronormative femininity, whiteness and the thin ideal (Duke, 2000; Ducille, 1996; Pedersen & Markee, 1991; Peers, 2004), continues to be a polarizing cultural figure of embodied achievement, control and beauty. For some, Barbie remains a cultural fashion icon and to others, the embodiment of feminized subjugation (Borges, 2012) though there have been small steps to 'diversify' Barbie's image. In 2016 Mattel Barbie introduced their Fashionista collection of "New Gen Ken" dolls – Ken dolls of different races, hairstyles (including cornrows) and different body types: broad, slim and original. The new Barbie dolls also included more racial diversity and three different body types: curvy, tall and petite. Needless to say, the "curvy" and "broad" dolls are anything but curvy and broad. Even some of the features of the Black dolls have been called into question as many appear to have features described as "white girls dipped in chocolate" – an expression mentioned in the short documentary *The Colour of Beauty* (2010) by Canadian filmmaker Elizabeth St. Philip to describe Black girls in the fashion industry who may have Black skin but have very Eurocentric facial and bodily features. Like Barbie's gendered body and all her fashionable accessories girls around the world can obtain, so too are women bombarded with fashion/dress items, tips and strategies all promising to help women and girls obtain seamless aesthetic perfection. For

corpulent bodies, like older or Black racialized bodies (Tate, 2018), bodies that are marketed as having to shift, change, 'put themselves together' – edit themselves in order to be seen as more socially acceptable, there is a considerable financial and emotional expense to consistently 'pay in' to a bottomless pit for unguaranteed access to approval and belonging.

Looking Back Moving Forward: Critical Approaches to Women's Bodies

A critical approach to the body first explicates the Cartesian mind/body divide by redefining the two as inextricably linked. In fact, a feminist analysis argues that the androcentric study of the body not only excludes the woman but further essentializes and cements 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as mutually exclusive binaries through this mythical divide. A critical approach instead argues that bodies are in fact made and unmade and are therefore not static, impenetrable, matter. Bodies are constantly becoming (Coleman, 2008). According to Butler, the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. "One does one's body and indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries, and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well" (Butler, 1988: 520). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view of the body also disclaims any presumption of the body having an interior essence or an origin so to speak. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is from the body that one makes sense of the world around them (Crossley, 2012: 133). All perception stems from the body (Merleau-Ponty, 2006). Historical dualism has privileged the mind as the masculine, rational way of thought while the body, set in direct opposition and inferior to the mind, is regarded as the feminine, fleshy, inert counterpart. The feminine body has been routinely analyzed through a medical gaze (Foucault, 1994) as a pathologized body without much reactive or transformative potential – a second-class citizen body that is perpetually dissatisfactory. This

pathologizing of the flesh is mirrored in biomedical narratives of the fat excessive, diseased body. It is also reflected in societally prescribed fashion 'rules' that demand fat bodies be covered up or otherwise minimized.

Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo conceptualizes body dissatisfaction as arising out of and reproducing normative feminine practices of our culture. These practices train feminized bodies in docility and obedience to cultural demands (Bordo, 2003: 26-27). Similarly, cultural historian Sander Gilman, on certain shapes of noses as signifiers of racial difference, states that body imagery follows the lines of political and cultural power (Gilman, 2010: 212). Power, however has to be problematized as unstable since bodies are not merely inert dupes at the mercy of power unable to subvert. Bordo also muses about the ironic empowerment through accommodation that women may seek by the achievement of the thin ideal. In particular, Bordo suggests that by disciplining the body, women may simultaneously communicate bodily mastery and control as well as the rejection of maternal authority (Tyner & Ogle, 2009: 108). A critical feminist, socio-cultural model of understanding the body situates it as foremost a living body, a historically and culturally specific entity that is viewed, treated, and experienced differently depending on its social interactions and intersectionalities through time and space. A more complicated model of understanding body issues decentralizes, according to Foucault, the notion of power as being the possession of certain individuals, groups or structures by instead seeing power as a dynamic network of non-centralized asymmetrical forces (Bordo, 2003: 26).

Decentralizing power, I argue, creates spaces for resistance and for nuanced interwoven dances with power. It also denaturalizes power and reveals its limitations as well as our possibilities to individually and collectively create or change discourse. The act of re-writing, speaking and seeing fat bodies outside of being misfits is an example of this. My dissertation

provides insight as to how a small group of women negotiate, make sense of, and construct their body aesthetic against and in relation to dominant normalized ideals living *within* a system that routinely stratifies fat and black embodiment. Women are consistently bumping up against social scripts regarding bodies we are told we must possess in order to embody good citizenship and gain access to the social and cultural frills afforded certain bodies. We are routinely negotiating our responses to these scripts often inscribed on and through our bodies. Our decisions are informed by complex negotiations along the continuum between accommodating dominant fat phobic, racist beauty body ideals and reworking or reimagining spoiled identities into ones that may be more freeing and affirming. Black bodies have a long history of being fetishized as spectacles in visual culture and arts (Danquah, 2009).

Four years before the birth of the subsequent "Hottentot Venus," the rare oil painting of a Black woman slave in Canada *Portrait of a Negro Slave* (1786) by Francois Malepart de Beaucourt was created. Canadian art historian Charmaine Nelson contends that this rendering of the Black woman slave body, like other western (European and American) representations of Black woman slaves, require crucial consideration in order to understand how issues of race and racial identity function through visual culture (Nelson, 2004). These paintings according to Nelson are, "sites where racial and sexual identification was produced and where the Black slave body as commodity was confirmed and deployed" (Nelson, 2004: 23). The significance of portraiture during this time period further illustrates that the creation of the portrait was by no means a warm 'salute' to the Black woman slave sitter portrayed. It in fact bolstered the status of their White slave master. Nelson explains that unlike genre paintings, portraits were visual documentation of a precise historically-specific individual as opposed to an idealized or allegorical representation of a generic person. Portraits relied upon recognition and legibility of

the sitter (Nelson, 2004: 22-23) and functioned for White sitters as visual illustrations of their social status. Portraits of Black slaves, unlike White sitters, were refused the specificity of their names within the painting titles. Slave paintings, which were always placed in lesser spaces of importance in the house, and physically lower hung served to reproduce and reconfirm the inferiority of the Black body while reaffirming the superiority of White colonial sitters.

Critical gender & race scholar Kaila Adia Story extends that the nude or seminude bodies of Black women in 19th century paintings and photographs suggested the hypersexuality of African Black women and the hidden sexuality of European women who, although objectified through these visual images, were still allowed to remain modest and fully human (Henderson, 2010: 40). According to Story, these images of Black bodies then still inform readings of Black women contemporarily. For example, Don Imus's "nappy-headed hoes" comment about the Rutgers women's basketball team in 2007 based solely on his readings of their Blackness and gender as equating to being whores (Story, 2010: 41). Story argues that the "Black feminine body" from the 15th to the 21st century constructed as dangerous or vile remains a necessary construction via popular culture to ensure that, "Western men's "superior" position within the Western body politic is solidified," (Story, 2010: 41). In 2015, Gabourey Sidibe, a very dark-skinned, and superfat[27] African-American actress performed a love scene with her non-fat, toned African-American actor on the hit FOX network drama series *Empire*. She and her on-screen boyfriend are making love on a rooftop. The racist and fat phobic backlash online was immediate, signaling a mass rejection of her fatness and Blackness as desirable or deserving of

[27] Superfat is a colloquial word used to describe someone who is extremely fat. Within obesity rhetoric biomedical language, this person would be identified as 'morbidly obese' but through critical fat approaches the term super fat is used instead to indicate someone who is extremely fat.

intimacy and affection.[28] Not only was she ridiculed but concern was shown to the cis-male actor who some internet trolls worried could have been 'hurt' by the excess of her body. Sidibe is also the author of her memoir *This is Just My Face: Try Not to Stare* (2017) which chronicles her rise to fame and delves into race, weight, discrimination and her family life. More recently, Sidibe has publicly stated that she had laparoscopic bariatric surgery in 2017 to improve her health. It is impossible not to speculate whether or not Sidibe's body-shaming or hopeful access to more 'mainstream' acting roles in a slimmer body may have weighed on her decision. In 2017, New York Times bestselling African American author Roxane Gay, though lighter skinned than Sidibe, and also superfat, also received online criticisms because of her embodiment by readers and reporters alike. In *Hunger* (2017), Gay chronicles various life experiences she has encountered that she identifies as instrumental to [the making of] her fatness[29] and she also addresses the ways in which society has seen her fat body as a problem especially citing some of the spatial ways[30] in which her body is sized out of spaces. Gay explains in *Hunger* how fat bodies through visual culture, media and dominant discourse is perpetually vilified or at the very

[28] For examples of the social media trolling Sidibe has experienced visit: https://www.theodysseyonline.com/gabourey-sidibe-attacked-sex-scene-empire; https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/gabourey-sidibe-was-racially-profiled-at-a-chanel-store_us_59147280e4b066b42171b664; including a media story suggesting Gabourey had died of an asthma attack which is a telltale assault on her fatness since it is assumed all fat bodies are sick bodies one breath away from the grave: https://www.inquisitr.com/2937323/gabourey-sidibe-dead-did-32-year-old-empire-actress-die-of-an-asthma-attack-breaking/

[29] Gay's *Hunger* has also been critiqued by some fat activists who challenge aspects of her personal narrative as fat pathologizing since Gay credits much of her fat becoming as a direct response to being gang-raped at 12 years of age. For some fat activists, this perpetuates the normalized idea of fatness as a response to [or embodiment of] violence or as a way of making oneself 'invisible' or undesirable to the male heterosexual gaze. In my opinion, and as I will elaborate further on in my dissertation conclusion, fat activism as well as "body positivity" must acknowledge complex personal narratives around fat becoming and being. One story cannot fit for all and our stories of our corporeality are not always "positive" or one-dimensional. This doesn't subtract from their power. My participants body stories illustrate this and can help inform how body positivity and similar 'movements' can become more inclusive and equitable.

[30] For more on spatial discrimination and its effects see Lesleigh Owen's "Living Fat in a Thin-Centric World: Effects of Spatial Discrimination on Fat Bodies and Selves" (2012), Amy Gullage's "An Uncomfortable Fit: Fatness, Femininity and the University" (2010) and Alexandra Brewis, Sarah Trainer et al. "Publically Misfitting: Extreme Weight and the Everyday Production of Felt Stigma (2016).

least perceived as ‘lesser than’ that of thin white coded bodies. This is reminiscent to the visual and discursive construction of Black women’s bodies.

According to visual culture scholar Carole E. Henderson (2010), historical representations of black femininity continue to inform how Black women today make sense of our own and each other’s bodies. They also require Black women to perform a delicate and challenging dance of redemption as we move forward towards constructing and reconstructing our identities outside of Eurocentric imagery which often relies on narratives of Black bodies as inferior and speculative. This historical obsession with owning, controlling, seeing and profiting from Black women’s bodies has been documented extensively through the retelling of the life of the ‘Hottentot Venus’ — the twenty-year old Khoi Khoi young woman taken from South Africa in 1810 and enslaved *beyond* her death in 1815.

Utilizing Black feminist disability theory, critical race theorist Janell Hobson presents an analysis of historical, contemporary visual discourses, and narratives regarding Black women’s bottoms. She first historicizes the Black woman’s bottom by revisiting the history of Saartjie Baartman (1790-1815) the ‘Hottentot Venus.’ Venus’ exploited, ‘unmirrored’ (Hobson, 2003: 89) buttocks (Hobson, 2003:101) and genitals became the “preeminent example of racial and sexual alterity” (Hobson, 2003: 93) used to position Black women’s sexuality and bodies as racially inferior, abject, sexually deviant as the wild savage.

Hobson illustrates that this historical ideology of racial difference within white supremacist discourse has contemporary currency by visiting the site of late 20th century photography through the lens of white French photo artist Jean-Paul Goude and white American artist Robert Mapplethorpe who are both enamored by Black bodies, especially fetishized black bottoms. To ensure Black women’s bodies do not remain trapped in an anachronistic space of a

powerless relic or a White artist's gaze, Hobson extends her analysis by discussing how some contemporary Black feminist artists such as photographers Carla Williams, Coreen Simpson and performing artists Urban Bush Women are resisting and trying to reimagine, through an 'oppositional gaze,' (hooks, 1992: 116) Black women's bodies differently. They demand personhood to Black women's bodies by seeing them as both sights and sites of liberation and by reclaiming and renaming their relationships with their own bottoms and bodies through their artistic work.[31] Photo artists Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner's *Wanted* exhibit (2017) at the Art Gallery of Ontario re-imagines 18th century enslaved freedom seekers as 21st century sitters in high fashion photography. The work is also a commentary on the power of clothing as aspirational devices. Art historian Charmaine Nelson explains the significance of the imagery of Ishmael who escaped from a Quebec merchant, "Although Turner and Pirbhai are staging our epic re-encounters with enslaved freedom fighters, their fashionable, confident namesakes appear to have more in common with models in contemporary fashion magazines… The power of this potential reincarnation is that it allows us to think not only about what John Turner stole from Ishmael (his labour, years of his life, his access to self-determination), and how John Turner imagined and wanted to see Ishmael, but also how Ishmael, liberated from bondage, may have imagined and represented himself" (Nelson, 2017).[32]

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[31] In Janell Hobson's "Black Beauty and Digital Spaces: The New Visibility Politics" (2016), Hobson examines Black-women-centered projects online – featuring both ordinary and celebrity black women – and argues, "that black beauty has become both an essential and essentialist tool to validate the black body, which has wide scale repercussions on our inclusive politics that represent the collective body politic." Hobson argues that Black beauty projects must grapple more extensively with the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability. These subjectivities, she argues, "can reframe black embodiment beyond commercialized spectacles and toward more diverse representations of liberated bodies." Hobson, a women, gender and sexuality scholar, uses a transnational lens to highlight women's iconography and experiences in global or black diasporic perspective. See: Hobson, J. (2016) Black Beauty and Digital Spaces: The New Visibility Politics. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No. 10.doi:10.7264/N39C6VQK.

[32] To read Charmaine Nelson's essay visit: https://ago.ca/wanted-essays#reimagining. There are no pages.

According to art critic John Berger, “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak” (Berger, 1990: 7). Berger argues that it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world and that the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled (Berger, 1990:7). The importance of the visual to our meaning making of ourselves and the social world around us is significant. Historicizing the power of the visual image, McClintock states that by the 1890s advertising had emerged as the central cultural form of commodity capitalism (McClintock, 1995: 210). Images of Black people as buffoons, savages, “happy” slaves, asexual mammies, matriarchs, minstrels and other controlling images (Collins, 2009: 76) soared in popularity through the traveling of images via imperialist projects (McClintock, 1995; Collins, 2009).

Shaw extends this critique of Black bodies to include fat Black women when she hypothesizes about why fat White women may have a harder time with their body acceptance than fat Black women. According to Shaw, it is because fat White women personify conflicted representations. Their Whiteness marks them as an ideal embodiment of womanhood while their fatness evokes the unruliness and disobedience that has been historically and contemporarily associated with Black skin (Shaw, 2006: 121). Fat hatred, within a Eurocentric aesthetic, is built inherently upon antiblackness and misogyny which creates space for non-Black bodies to separate with various degrees of ease from the otherness-*ness* of fat blackness by authoring and institutionalizing unreachable body scripts. White feminized bodies are expected to be thin as ascribed to whiteness and particularly limiting performances of white heteronormative, equally illusive femininity. Fatness revokes citizenship.

Fatness, as evidenced by most popular culture and mainstream fashions, is a material excess that must be ‘bottled up’ at any cost. Images of fat women in fashion magazines or

conventional ‘plus size’ stores at the local mall rarely show stomach rolls. Instead ‘foundation’ garments and girdles are referenced earlier are utilized to shape, make appropriate, and control the fat for public consumption. Blackness, is also routinely ‘watered down’ and controlled in plus fashion advertising as well as in more mainstream iterations of body acceptance campaigns and activisms where once again Whiteness is often centered. To borrow loosely from the phenomenological concept of dys-appearance -spelled *dys-appearance*,[33] the fat Black woman’s body has often been positioned as alien, the unfamiliar, and the undesirable.

The white fat body, I argue is predominantly normalized as the familiar body in fat activism so much so that some white women, as evidenced through certain fatshion activisms, can now proclaim, what phenomenology refers to as a disappearance (spelled the normal way) of their body. They have arrived at commodified “body positivity” in that, as they become more ‘at ease’ in their bodies in the world - since theirs is the reflection often starring back at them in fat activism, their bodies are more able to “disappear” from their attention and their conscience as abject bodies. Body positivity campaigns have their merit but it is crucial to consider which bodies it signifies and which ones remain predominantly marginalized. Caucasian, very fair-skinned, and racially ambiguous ‘plus size’ models with hourglass figures are predominantly featured.[34] Black models with more ‘ethnic’ features and those who may have pear, apple-shaped bodies or double chins are relatively absent from fashion. Fashion has always been a tool utilized by individuals and institutions to define, maintain and subvert race, age, size, class, gender, disability and sexuality boundaries (Czerniawski, 2015; Ford, 2015; Kelm, 1998; Miller, 2009; Shaw, 2005; Strickfaden, Johnson & Tullio-Pow, 2014; Tullio-Pow & Strickfaden (2015);

[33] This is the ‘dys’ appearance of the body as sick or otherwise abject

[34] The pattern of the exotic, racially ambiguous feminized body is evident in the production of urban music videos which routinely perpetuate Eurocentric beauty as the ideal by not selecting models who are ‘just’ Black without Eurocentric facial features with long, flowing hair or lighter skin (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007).

Twigg, 2010, 2013, 2017). According to Glory Robertson, cited in Shaw (2005), European women's fashions of the 1800s and 1900s were not available to Black and working-class White women not only because of their cost, but because the restrictive designs and the ample layers of fabric made movement for work in the garments for those women virtually impossible (Shaw, 2005:149).

In conclusion, this chapter has highlighted the hybrid theoretical framework informing my research. As such, I have argued for a critical, intersectional approach to women's bodies. Interviewing and documenting the nuanced body stories of my participants, supports an inquiry into the intersectional, layered realities of their lives as fat, Black women in Toronto. Their embodied experiences provide an informative foundation for understanding the societal curriculums that have helped them address and shape their identities through various social interactions, across time, space, and through material objects of significance such as their fashion. Learning how participants move through their worlds as adults, while they reflect on their childhood socialization processes with family, friends, and in schooling environments for instance, may provide educational insight towards supporting future generations of Black girls actively negotiating identity and taking up space in the skin they are in.

The participants in this dissertation have not experienced Black 'girlhood' since the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the historical significance of their embodied childhood memories is arguably linked to the textured ways in which participants make sense of their bodies through various social interactions, social forces, activisms, dress politics such as clothes-switching and clothes meshing, which I unpack later on in the dissertation discussion chapters five and six, and how they seek and take up space in their lives. The richness of their body stories, and the future implications of this scholarship to education both in and outside of the

traditional classroom, resonate best through qualitative research methodology discussed in my next chapter and in particular the qualitative in-depth interview.

CHAPTER 3: QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Education research methodologist John Creswell outlines four guiding 'philosophical assumptions' made by researchers who undertake qualitative research. These include beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research) (Creswell, 2013: 19-23; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The ontological assumption challenges the idea of a fixed reality and instead argues reality is multiple and unfixed as seen through many perspectives. Therefore, qualitative researchers generally begin from the premise of multiple truths or realities. The epistemological assumption (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified) requires the qualitative researcher to work closely with her participants listening to their narratives, documenting, and observing. The axiological assumption means that the qualitative researcher acknowledges the value-laden nature of the study, actively records perceived values, and biases and recognizes the value-laden nature of information gathered from research participants (Creswell, 2013: 20). Qualitative researchers must situate themselves in their work and be aware of how researcher location and reflexivity inform the articulation of the research problem and multiple outcomes. The fourth assumption, the methodological assumption, is characterized as inductive, emerging and shaped throughout the research project. It is consistently open to revision as the research necessitates, which supports the potential 'messiness' of emerging knowledges through research.

Positivist or quantitative texts that strive toward an accomplished unity have been referred to as 'readerly texts' (Silverman, 1983). However qualitative research strives towards 'writerly texts' (Silverman, 1983) or 'messy texts' (Denzin, 1997). Poststructuralist ethnographer Caroline Fusco addresses the benefit of messy texts through her research on ethnographic

dilemmas of doing research on the body in social spaces. As Fusco reiterates, “Heterogeneity, contradiction, anarchy, and incoherence characterize messy texts. These texts promote an infinite play of signification; they are segmented and fractured texts; and they deny the possibility of closure…” (Fusco, 2008: 175). Similarly, sociologist Róisín Ryan-Flood and cultural theorist Rosalind Gill argue that far from being a straightforward, clinical, easily manageable process, feminist qualitative research inevitably presents numerous challenges at ontological, epistemological, political, ethical and personal levels (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010:2). It is messy. My study compounded with my intersubjectivity as researcher and as an ‘insider’ makes for messiness indeed. Interviewing my participants without the use of rigid, linear questions adds to the complexities of my participants’ body stories.

According to Ann Oakley’s article, “Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms” (1981), qualitative researchers conducting feminist interviews cannot be disengaged from their research topic. There is always a connection. Oakley suggests that rather than viewing women as objects of the researcher’s gaze, feminist researchers should develop ways of conceptualizing the interview as an encounter between women with common interests, who are sharing knowledge (Devault & Gross, 2006: 178). Feminist in-depth qualitative interviewing, as qualitative research method, also challenges the notion of stories being a straightforward source of truth. In Joan Scott’s landmark article, “The Evidence of Experience” (1991), she argues that experience is always discursively structured in that what a person sees and understands is always shaped by what one already knows and can articulate (Devault & Gross, 2006: 178-179). Scott borrows from the theoretical concept of intertextuality[35] coined by Julia Kristeva in her literary 1966

[35] The concept of intertextuality that she initiated proposes the text as a dynamic site in which relational processes and practices are the focus of analysis instead of static structures and products. The "literary word," she writes in "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," is "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings" (1980, 65). I apply this literary meaning to the notion of social interactions to

essay, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" later translated in *Desire in Language* (1980), which argues that a text cannot be read apart or without influence from previously read texts. From a sociological perspective, this can be further understood by applying a fundamental concept within sociology and more specifically symbolic interactionism, 'definition of the situation.' Sociologists William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki are credited for laying the theory and research groundwork for the concept. However, the conceptualization of definition of the situation first appeared in print in sociologists Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess', *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921). Definition of a situation can be used to explain the idea that a person's perception of any given situation or interaction, or what they hold as true, is based on a personal and particular framing of said situation or interaction and its very true consequences for the person and the person's behaviour in said situation or interaction. This concept can be applied to the understanding of a basic assumption in qualitative, in-depth interviewing research: the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out, interpret, and respond to that and future experiences (Blumer, 1969: 2; Seidman, 2006:10). There are many 'truths' and as such we must always be wary of the 'single story' as Nigerian, feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns in her 2009 TED talk titled 'The Danger of a Single Story.' Recognizing that the stories of my participants represent their own situated truths,[36] the research design sets up open-ended interviews so as to ensure participants tell their stories, not the stories they think I want.

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illustrate the way in which the 'same' situation, event, or interaction experienced by an individual is not only experienced differently by other individuals, but even for the initial individual their experience(s) can never be divorced from prior knowledges based on past situations, events or interactions as the ongoing "texts" that help inform their embodied lives and life views. Source: http://faculty.weber.edu/cbergeson/quixote/martinez.pdf

[36] Situated truth is informed by the concept "situated knowledges" developed by Donna Haraway (1988). Situated knowledges argue against the idea of a singular truth or source of knowing/knowledge. Instead, there are multiple knowledges, though these multiple truths are not valued equally. As such, some knowledges and truths such as those from marginalized and historically oppressed peoples are devalued and seen as less rigorous. I argue that the lived body stories of Black, fat women have not been valorized.

Research Design

According to qualitative research and methodology scholars, Herbert and Irene Rubin, "Qualitative interviewing design is flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and locked in stone" (1995: 43). In *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (2012), Rubin and Rubin further encourage the use of qualitative in-depth interviewing as a compelling method for not reducing people's experiences to numbers or stripping away invaluable context. "Qualitative interviewing allows us to see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is often looked at but seldom seen" (2012: xv). Following this perspective, I conducted seven in-person, audio-recorded, qualitative in-depth interviews followed by thematic analysis. One-on-one, in-person interviews with my participants were critical to me as both a researcher and as a self-identified fat Black woman. The goal of visibility – of essentially centering Black women's body stories in this study was integral to this project. Black fat embodiment can be both profoundly hyper-visible *and* invisible simultaneously. The body stories of Black fat women are seldom told. As such, I was deeply committed to their acts of 'telling' and therefore wanted to be able to witness their interviews in person. I was committed to having my participants share their stories where we could both see each other in the same time and physical space. I did not want to miss any non-verbal cues, verbal misunderstandings, or body idioms as they presented themselves during the interview.[37] Furthermore, I wanted to be able to shake the hand of my participant in thanks for their time or to be able to give or receive a hug with consent if the opportunity presented itself. These elements

[37] Body idiom is bodily behaviour that conveys complex information to others even when words are not spoken. For example, dress, body language, facial gestures, and emotional expressions all comprise the body idiom (Goffman, 1959). I made note where substantial body idioms were present in interviews such as deep sighs, head nods and laughter – particularly when there was laughter (initiated by the participant) as certain participants retold their experience with trauma or otherwise challenging memories.

of non-verbal body language would be missed in a phone or even Skype interview. There are four embodied, 'non-verbal' communication modes that add additional layers of texture to the in-person interview: proxemics communication (the use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes), chronemics (the use of pacing of speech and length of silence in conversation), kinesics (includes any non-linguistic body movements or postures), and paralinguistic (includes all the variations in volume, pitch and quality of voice) (Fontana & Frey, 2005: 661-662). It was important to me that my interview milieu openly facilitate any of these non-verbal modes if and when they presented. As such, the site for the interviews and aspects of the physical environment were considered with each participant's comfort in mind.

The location of the interview was also of extreme significance to the relaxing milieu I hoped to create to help facilitate the interviews. As such, I invited my participants to choose their preferred location: their home, my home, or a location in community they were comfortable with. As Alena Singleton's study "The Effect of Race on Eating & Dieting Behaviours Among American Women" (2006) found, when Black women's eating and body image concerns were examined within community-based rather than clinical settings, they shared more of their personal experiences. Aaron M. Kuntz (2010) discusses the importance of space in qualitative interviews and argues that an analysis of space is critical though it is often left unexamined in qualitative inquiry because of overreliance on the linguistic element of the interview. Ignoring the material, embodied implications of meaning-making sustains Cartesian duality. Kuntz argues that, "instead of replicating the overly simplistic mind-body division of human experience, we might begin from the ontological assumption that the linguistic realm is implicated by the physical: the discursive is affected by and affects our material worlds," (Kuntz, 2010: 146). Kuntz further underscores that 'space,' in reference to both *material* spaces (buildings,

classrooms) and *social* spaces (the meanings we make of our material surroundings), must be considered in qualitative inquiry (Kuntz, 2010: 146).

Burgess-Limerick & Grace et al. (1996) expand on the significance of interview locations when they discuss the negotiation of "power" and the politics of researcher/participant positionality during the interviewing process in their article, "The Politics of Interviewing: Power Relations and Accepting the Gift." The 'gift' the researcher is accepting *is* the participant's sharing of experience and expertise via the interview. The authors discuss how selecting times and locations of interviews based on participant preference can help to create a more participant-centered environment for the researcher conducting the interview. This fosters collaboration between researcher and participant from the point of contact and could be maintained straight through to reviewing final research before it is published if both researcher and participant agree on this level of participant involvement (Limerick & Grace, et al., 1996: 453). With these scholars and my own experiences of being interviewed by others for their academic or community research projects in mind, I wanted to ensure a space that was most beneficial to my participants and a time of day or night that was most convenient. All interviews except for one took place in either my home or the home of the participant. The lone community interview took place at a Toronto Public Library, which we both agreed upon as the best location due to its proximity because of our schedules that day and what part of town we were in. We had a fruitful interview. However, the library closing hour loomed. I was more conscious of time in this interview since we were not "at home" and needed to wrap up by eight o'clock when the library closed.

For interviews which took place in my home, I paid close attention to our physical environment. This included air-conditioning on or off at my participant's request, locking my

two cats inside of a bedroom if a participant, prior to the actual interview, confirmed a fear of animals, vacuuming the living room area where interviews took place, and a thorough cleaning of my kitchen and main bathroom, along with the removal of a weight scale[38] in the main shared bathroom. I also had participant pre-approved food and beverages, which I provided at my home or brought to theirs as participants desired. To clarify these were not elaborate meals. They usually included a selection of cheeses, fresh fruit, juices, water and crackers and therefore my role was more so that of snack 'setter' than chef. In one case I did bring a cooked chicken from a grocery store because the time of our interview fell during lunchtime. I also remember having some lactose free participant needs which I happily fulfilled. In six of the seven interviews, my participants and I communicated over food and beverages. Participants appeared to appreciate the snacks and they often served as ice breakers as something, rather immediate, we could both relate to and fall back on as a shared, enjoyable activity at various moments throughout the interview. At times, participants would request more snacks. I also felt very comfortable almost immediately in the homes of my participants too as they'd allow me to use their kitchens to wash, cut and assemble the snacks. I also brought disposable plates, utensils, glasses and napkins as well and that extra gesture seemed well received. In all my interviews I welcomed washroom breaks, stretching, and mobile device check ins if I or a participant needed them.[39] The interview provided the necessary milieu for my participants to retell the elements of their body stories they generously shared with me.

[38] I live with others and the scale is not mine. It stays in the main bathroom, which my participants would have to use if needed. I did not want them to see a weight scale in my bathroom, which I felt could be perceived as a symbol of mine or anyone else in my household's weight monitoring. As a fat activist, I am aware of the consequences of weight obsession. I do not use a scale unless I am in a doctor's office and did not want that symbol to impact how my participants potentially interacted with me during the interview, illicit certain emotions or suggest certain positions I might have wanted them to share on the issue of weight management. Therefore, removing the scale was part of my identity management in maintaining my status as researcher.

[39] I never used my mobile devices during interviews or breaks. This accommodation was strictly for participants.

The qualitative unstructured interview seeks to illuminate how my participants perceive and negotiate meanings, theirs or others, of their fat and Black woman bodies in their everyday lives through their social interactions and significant objects as shared to me through their body stories. According to qualitative research scholar, Irving Seidman, the retelling of experience is a primary means of comprehending life experiences: "It is at the heart of what it means to be human: our ability to symbolize experience through language" (Seidman, 2006: 8). While telling stories one way or another is a prominent part of life, interest in qualitative research and specifically in-depth interview as a method of inquiry has a history of being devalued and seen as unscholarly in many disciplines with a preference for more positivist quantitative research (Seidman, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This privileging of the positivist as opposed to a constructivist or interpretivist approach contributes to the marginalization of personal narratives (Silvera, 1989) which often include the oral histories of historically marginalized groups such as women and more specifically women of colour.[40]

Qualitative feminist research helps me interpret the complex body stories of the seven participants' accounts in this study. Ideally, transparent, inclusive research utilizes decolonized methodologies and interviewing practices that foster a deeper respect for participants. According to Indigenous education research scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, there is an interdependent imperative in decolonized research to interact with participants as active subjects, co-researchers or participants who are ethically involved in research regarding the telling of their stories, unique circumstances or social determinants informing their lives (Smith, 1999). I choose to identify the

[40] According to Seidman (2006:13) there has been a historical and contemporary preference towards quantitative research in education dating from the 1960s to the 2000s. By its opponents, qualitative research is often second guessed for credibility, rigor, and tends to be more scrutinized by funding and publication bodies. For a complete discussion on qualitative research viability and credibility debates see Seidman (2006) and Catherine K. Riessman (2008).

women in my study as involved participants because how I, as the researcher, identify them is informed by my researcher theoretical and methodological agenda as well as my researcher ethic. Seidman (2006: 14) selects the term "participant" in his research as opposed to "interviewee" to represent a more equitable sharing of participation between researcher and participant. I felt that this stance and the creation of a friendly environment during the interview were critical for my study. Kirsch cautions researchers to differentiate between friendliness and friendship and suggests that, "we need to remind participants of the fine line that separates friendship and friendliness and must closely examine our own expectations about the kind of interactions we hope to have with participants" (Kirsch, 1999:30). While I know my researcher relationship with my participants is not long-term, I sought to forge a 'congeniality' that demonstrated my care for them as people, as fellow Black fat women, and not merely as a means to an end for my intellectual project.

Participant Contact & Procedures: Pre-Interview, During & Post-Interview

In terms of participant selection, the women were primarily sourced through the method of snowball sampling. I discuss the benefits of this further in the chapter. My participants and I spoke on the phone and/or communicated via email before interviewing took place to ensure they were comfortable with the interview material and the overall subject matter of my dissertation. This 'pre-interview' (Seidman, 2006) process is integral to the process, as it provided me with the opportunity to build rapport with my participants before we met. A thorough review of the consent document which encompassed the scope and goals of the project was crucial at the start of each interview, along with establishing the name each participant wished to be referred to moving forward with both the interview and the writing of this dissertation. Every participant,

except one, requested anonymity. Participants were also given copies of their transcripts via email so they could review them; again, this was another way to ensure they were comfortable with the material they shared in the interview. They were given explicit freedom to request the removal of information in the transcript that no longer made them comfortable post interview. They were also reminded that even though they had completed an interview with me, if they got home and 'changed their mind' about participating at any point, they had the right to inform me and to have their transcripts destroyed immediately with no negative consequences to them. On the one and only occasion I had a participant who realized that she had revealed personal identifiers, I promptly agreed to remove them. No participants chose to withdraw from the interview process and to date no participants have terminated their participation in the project. Participants were also encouraged to ask me questions and share comments throughout the actual interview, as they felt necessary for clarity or for their own process of gaining trust with me in our shared setting. Occasionally, participants asked some questions and offered general comments about my own personal experiences as a fellow fat Black woman in Toronto.

Though my responses were always authentic, I tried to self-monitor in order to reduce the transference of any responses that may suggest implicit value judgments. For example, when a participant would say, "you know what I mean?" after sharing what they thought was a mutual experience we both might have had or have similar opinions on based on our shared identity as fat and/or Black women, even when I knew exactly what they meant, I'd encourage them to further clarify through a follow-up question or comment. Having a theatre background, I have always been very animated with my hands and eyes for instance. I was careful not to affirm or disaffirm any commentary from my participants vis-à-vis my body language. I tried to maintain a more neutral physicality and engaged with nods, headshakes, "hmm" sounds, and other familiar

conversational gestures when I felt they were appropriate and I always took my cues from the participants. It was important to approach each interview remembering that each woman, though phenotypically similar to me, was a new interview, a new body story waiting to unfold. My descriptive and exploratory research aim is captured in Rosser's words in "Using Lenses of Feminist Theory" (2006): to "dissolve[s] the universal subject and dissolve[s] the possibility that women speak in a unified voice or that they can be universally addressed" (32-33). "Due to women's [diverse] situatedness," she continues, "the category of woman can no longer be regarded as smooth, uniform, and homogenous" (33). Through qualitative feminist research I hope to share the messy aspects of these women's body stories that do not readily emerge in true false or multiple-choice questionnaires.

The research is shaped both by the stories of the seven participants and by my own lived body experience as a Black fat woman living in Toronto. It cannot, nor is it meant to, stand in as a generalization for all. As mentioned earlier, feminist interviewing as a methodology resituates women's historically subjugated accounts of their lived experience as both invaluable practical knowledge and theory (Collins, 2009; Harding, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2011; Rice, 2014; Smith, 1990). In Black feminist, anti-racist feminist, and fat studies scholarship an emphasis is on prioritizing the voices of marginalized women. Black and fat women are all too often researched and talked about as opposed to being listened to as experts on their lived experiences and bodies. Using open-ended unstructured interviewing, I follow each woman's direction of telling. This represents a significant departure from closed, structured interviews controlled mainly by the interviewer. Thematic analysis, which will be discussed further in the body stories analysis segment of this chapter, helps to make sense, compare, and recognize themes and intersecting tensions within women's accounts (Riessman, 2008). It provides a basis for creating linkages

between women's embodied narratives and larger social structures of power, access, inclusion and inequity.

Although no single methodology is inherently feminist, there are several principles typical of feminist research. These principles include asking research questions which acknowledge and validate women's experience; committing to collaboration with participants so that growth and learning strives to be mutually beneficial and interactive; analyzing how the researcher's identity, experience, training and theoretical framework shapes her research agenda, data analysis and findings and acknowledging the limitations of and contradictions inherent in research data, as well as alternative interpretations of that data (Kirsch, 1999). Research can be identified as feminist research when it includes a commitment to a) improve women's lives b) to acknowledge the contradictions in women's stories without attempting to water down or deny complexities in data, and c) to attempt to eliminate inequalities between researchers and participants (Kirsch, 1999). Ethical research also documents its limitations. As there is not a single 'feminism,' critical race, queer theorists and fat activist-scholars (Pausé, 2015) for instance have had to develop and take up research and practice imperatives that disrupt dominant epistemological assumptions (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1981, 1989; Lorde, 2007). This makes visible what Hill Collins refers to as a "matrix of domination" framework (Collins, 2009) for conceptualizing difference along a range of interlocking, intersectional inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality and size among others (Bilge & Hill Collins, 2016; Hesse-Biber, 2011:13; Ellison & McPhail et al., 2016; Pausé & Wykes et al. 2014; Lee & Pausé, 2016). My research seeks to position Black women's body stories as both sights and sites of crucial interdisciplinary knowledge within fat, feminist, education, sociology and fashion scholarship. Also inspired by the perceived unruliness and disobedience of my own fat, Black woman body in certain social

interactions, I wish to demonstrate the *indisciplinarity*[41] of my participants' body stories, which I argue cannot neatly be summed up in any one study or lifetime.

Ethics & The Role of Researcher

My research interview process began with my awareness that as researcher, I would have an 'effect' on this research at every stage of the process. One of my first ethical priorities as a reflexive researcher was to commit to being a good listener. Communications scholar Lisbeth Lipari's concept of 'listening otherwise' is the ethical call of conscience as opposed to the over reliance on speaking. According to Lipari, when we listen otherwise, "we listen from a space of unknowing, loss of control, loss of ideas and concept; an opening to what is, not shrinking away, being there" (Lipari, 2009: 57). Lipari further explains listening otherwise not as a project of consuming or incorporating the other as myself for instance but as an understanding and appreciation of the other as another, as a guest, as a "not-me" (Lipari, 2009: 56). Accordingly, while I cannot know fully my participants, my goal with the interview was, as Lipari stated, to be able to 'feel' with them (Lipari, 2009: 49) throughout the interview. Furthermore, Laura Kelly's 2007 study with 20 lesbian participants on body image suggested that because lesbians live within competing socio-cultural contexts (dominant culture and lesbian subculture) they may be unsure about how to feel about their bodies and how to talk with others on the issue (Kelly, 2007). Kelly (2007) labelled the phenomenon "body silence." While I'd argue that Kelly's two subcultures do not consider the intersectionalities, such as

[41] Indisciplinarity, is a term I've borrowed from English, arts historian, and visual culture scholar W.J.T Mitchell, who argued in "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture" (1995), that visual culture, though certainly interdisciplinary, went beyond the politeness of merely attending to plural practices as determined by various disciplines it is influenced by. Visual culture needed to be recognized for its *in*disciplined necessity to disrupt 'disciplined' ways of knowing. According to Mitchell, "The great virtue of visual culture as a concept is that it is "indiscipilinary" in its tendencies; it names a problematic rather than a theoretically well-defined object" (542). Mitchell also referred to the event of this indiscipline, the disobedience of and to disciplinary boundaries as the "anarchist" moment (541).

race, disability and age, within these two 'subcultures,' the concept of body silence is still useful in recognizing how certain marginalized voices are left out of women's body research. As the majority of my participants identify with a sexual orientation other than heterosexuality, it will be interesting to see the influence of sexuality, if at all, on their body stories.

One of feminism's central claims is that women's perspectives have often been silenced or ignored. As a result, feminist researchers have been interested in listening for gaps and absences in participant's talk, and in considering what meanings might reside beyond explicit speech (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 15). Deep listening can also manifest by listening through the gaps of silence in talking and by attending to what is not stated, but present. By listening for hidden meanings of phrases like "you know?" researchers can get at subjugated knowledge (Spivak, 1988: 25; DeVault, 1999). Although I had three general probes that helped inform the interview[42], committing to in-depth interviewing without prepared questions meant I knew that listening would be particularly necessary. My participants' responses would not be neatly offered through responses to neat, linear questions. I couldn't merely check my notes to match a segment of audio with an interview schedule question. I also had to be willing to sit with the nervousness of not exactly knowing what 'direction' the interviews would take, what elements of body stories my participants would share or not or what feelings their stories would evoke in me.

[42] Three general probes as areas of exploration help to focus participant narratives and reflections on their 1) life histories, 2) contemporary experiences, social interactions and objects of significance in regards to this research topic as Black women who self-identify as fat or other euphemisms for fat, and their 3) reflections on and meaning making of these experiences and their influence on how the participants view their bodies and any subsequent interactions (i.e. dating, making friends, schooling, the workplace), self-fashioning (i.e. dress), and community memberships/ activisms (online or in-person) they engage in based on those reflections as part of their self-valuation and definition.

Critical feminist body image, embodiment and difference scholar Carla Rice also calls for researcher reflexivity and transparency in "Imagining the Other? Ethical Challenges of Researching and Writing Women's Embodied Lives" (2009). Rice argues that as researchers we cannot ignore the physicalities of our bodies and their impact on how we do research. Rice asks, "How can critical researchers cultivate ethical relationships that incorporate our subjectivities, yet refrain from centering our experiences or irresponsibly interpreting those of participants? When studying sensitive subject matters such as body image where issues of appearance cannot be overlooked, how do we account for the influence of our own physicalities?" (Rice, 2009: 246) My research ethic involved being aware that my research, interview process, analysis, and subsequent findings are influenced by my values, my personal biography, and my physical *body* as a site of both embodied knowledge and contradiction.

According to Rice when emotion, perception, imagination and other dimensions of self are the main instruments of data creation, dilemmas of researchers' embodied subjectivities are not resolved but become central ethical considerations in research (Rice, 2009: 246). Rice's method for engaging these reflective questions revolve around her interrogation of her own researcher 'body secrets' as a former 'fat girl' and one with facial hair (Rice, 2009: 250-251). Rice theorizes ways that her own bodily privilege and abjection mark her interpretation of her participants' accounts. Her inquiry through her own self-interview situates how her researcher positionality, personal history, and physicality have contoured the content and interpretation of interviews. As Rice states, "Women's narratives that called to mind my own body struggles caused intense inner conflict, confusion and questioning and brought me face to face with the other in myself. Encountering this 'other within' has emerged as the most theoretically rich part

of the research process" (Rice, 2009: 262). For Rice, embodied reflexivity reveals how the rich body histories of researchers, as well as participants, contour research (Rice, 2009: 263).

In "Reflections on Doing Research Grounded in My Experience of Perinatal Loss: From Auto/biography to Autoethnography," sociologist Deborah Davidson, discusses her own loss and its influence on her decision to produce scholarship pertaining to hospital protocols for perinatal loss. Davidson interviews policy makers, nurses, doctors and also women who had experienced perinatal loss. By situating her own experience with loss, Davidson's personal experience research also illustrates the dynamism of embodied reflexivity. "My experience of grief and my experience as a researcher are interwoven in the study," explains Davidson (Davidson, 2011: 6.1). Davidson adds that, as a result of her own embodied experience and her inability to divorce her experience from her research; her methodological considerations for her project began prior to her recognition of them and will continue well beyond her project's limits (6.1).

Rice and Davidson's different accounts of embodied reflexivity and their willingness to grapple with the uncertainty of what it meant to be a whole person in their scholarship significantly influenced my decision to infuse aspects of my own fat, Black woman body story within this dissertation and my research plan. The researcher's body is a contested site of knowledge production (Bain & Nash, 2006). To ignore my embodiment as researcher is to deny the historicity of my body, experiences and activisms and the impact of research on me as researcher. I have deeply reflected on my own history with medicalization and the numerous occasions my body has been looked at, studied and poked in cold rooms with physicians barely making eye contact, quick to diagnose without deeply listening to my *expert* evidence about my own body.

When participants spoke of their experienced discrimination, on occasion I felt the tinge of my own experiences with discrimination and trauma as a child and later as a postsecondary student. As a researcher, it was critical to walk into each of my interviews with these reflections and to be open to *feeling* my interview. It was my hypothesis that to try to 'sanitize memories' would distract me from the interview at hand. I was committed to creating the most comfortable environment I could for my participants. Therefore, I needed to *feel* myself comfortable too, which included wearing cotton stretchable fabrics that allowed my body to breath while I focused on the richness of the interview. Even with my participant at the Toronto Public Library, I ensured I wore comfortable clothing.

My physical comfort was especially crucial since I wore a walking cast through the duration of all my summer 2014 participant interviews and used a cane while I healed from a broken ankle. I also ensured I reviewed the consent form, checked for consent at the end of the interview, and also explicitly reminded participants that at any time they could ask me questions too. Each participant not only received their transcripts electronically but also received a signed copy of the consent form which included project description, goals and both mine and my academic advisor's contact information. Part of my commitment to preparing the milieu also meant inviting participants to throw their legs on my coach if they so desired (and some did it without my invitation). I continue to reflect on my 'embodied methodology' throughout the dissertation.

Data Collection

Participant interviews were unstructured qualitative in-depth interviews and as such I did not have a concrete set of pre-determined interview questions (Seidman, 2006). I interviewed

participants using three general probes informed by what qualitative research and education scholar Irving Seidman calls "in-depth, phenomenologically based interviews" in his publication, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (2006: 15). The purpose of these three probes was to help participants situate and contextualize their experiences and thoughts about their bodies as they discussed them with me in the interview and to help focus participant narratives on 1) their life histories; 2) the contemporary experiences, social interactions and objects of significance relating to their identities as Black women who self-identify as fat or other euphemisms for fat; and, 3) their reflections on the meaning of these experiences and their influence on body perception, subsequent interactions (i.e. dating, making friends, schooling, the workplace), self-fashioning (i.e. dress), and community affiliations/activisms (online or in-person).[43] While these three general probes constitute the basis of my interviews, I followed each participant's lead and asked necessary spontaneous follow-up questions for clarification or to encourage further discussion on what they share. These follow up questions were different for each participant, which is standard during unstructured interviews where the researcher follows the participant's lead (Seidman, 2006).

While I had two informal email exchanges with potential participants where I introduced my research topic and its goals, I never promoted my call for participants publicly through social media or hardcopy flyers but elected instead for snowball sampling due to the nature of the

[43] These general probes were informed by the following research questions: 1. How do social interactions help inform fat, Black women's identity construction? What meanings and lessons are taken from these social interactions and how do they influence fat, Black women's everyday life experiences? 2. How might fat and Black embodiment for a small group of cisgender women influence their ability to access embodied currency? 3. How do self-identified fat Black women both accommodate and resist normalized body ideals? How might their 'putting themselves together' (i.e. sartorially 'well put together') through certain practices be strategic moves towards fitting in or disobediently *out* of particular settings?

study. Snowball sampling was originally introduced by James Coleman (1958) and Leo A. Goodman (1961) as a means of studying the structure of social networks. Snowball sampling over the years has been adapted by social scientists as a "non-probability convenience method for researching hard-to-reach or equivalently hidden populations" (Heckathorn, 2011: 356). In practice, it involves one or two initial research participants 'spreading the word' to other potential participants. In other words, the study starts out as a snowflake but as new potential participants are told the snowflake grows into the 'snowball.' Snowball sampling is also effective if population membership of the study group involves stigma or the group has networks that are difficult for outside researchers to penetrate such as populations in public health (i.e. drug users), public policy (i.e. illegal immigrants) or arts and culture (i.e. musicians) (Heckathorn, 2011: 356). Snowball sampling was particularly important due to the subject matter addressed in my study. My decision to utilize snowball sampling also reflected concern for my interview participants who are members of marginalized communities with long histories of being misrepresented in research and popular writing, which often perpetuates obesity epidemic rhetoric and reductive if not racist narratives on Black women. I comment on how the snowball method led to the identification, acceptance and further movement of the snowball in the participant profiles concluding this chapter. Four of my seven participants were located through the snowball method. The others I communicated with initially, as I knew of them through previous Toronto community-based activisms, to gauge interest in the project and for their support in connecting me with others.[44]

[44] Purposeful Sampling is often utilized in qualitative research. It involves the researcher identifying, connecting with and selecting individuals or groups that possess especially knowledgeable information and experience related to the topic of the research study (Hesse-Biber, 2016; Palinkas, Horwitz et al., 2015)

Many fat people, especially women, are well aware that even what appears to be a 'well-meaning' media interview on fat discrimination or fat liberation can quickly turn into the media re-presenting dominant discourses on fatness as abject, asexual, unhealthy and all the other 'war on obesity' fearmongering available to 'stitch up' or set up the fat interviewee (Cooper, 2014). It is also not uncommon for a fat person to be photographed for a news story or unknowingly recorded by a news cameraperson only to be represented as a 'headless fatty'[45] (Cooper, 2007). When fatness intersects with blackness, a person's distrust may be further compounded as dominant discourses rely on a trifactor of fat phobia, racism and sexism to function. As such, I knew that even as an 'insider,' a member of Toronto's Black and fat activism community, I could still experience caution from those wanting to ensure my motivations were not to spectacularize (Fanon, 1952; Fleetwood, 2011) fat and Black women's bodies. My body alone, although a potential source of familiarity for my participants, would not be an immediate 'pass' into building the trust and rapport I wished to forge with my participants.

I've kept in minimal contact with most participants post interview. This included an immediate thank you email for the interview sent within a few hours to a day after each completed interview and a reminder of their rights around consent. In both Black and fat activist event spaces in Toronto, I have bumped into some of my participants, attended the same events, and for those of us who are "friends" on social media (i.e. Facebook), we have liked and/or shared like-minded social justice events and posts, and also participated in DMs (Direct Messages) about said events or posts as many of us are members of similar "body positivity" and

[45] 'Headless Fatty' is when a fat person is unknowingly photographed placing emphasis on our stomach, fat rolls, or thighs with our head and face absent. This renders our fat bodies disembodied and cashes in on the grotesque misrepresentation of fat/fatness in support of media, cultural, and medical agendas i.e. fat equals illness, morbidity, and lack of self-control. These 'headless fatty' photos usually accompany on-air and print news stories on obesity, strains on health care, and the like.

“Black community support” Facebook groups. Although it was not explicitly stated or requested as a ‘rule,’ I have not initiated any conversation with participants about their interviews or vice versa whenever we’ve been in the same physical space with one another or on social media. I have fully honoured their anonymity as expected.

Transcript revision was another opportunity for participants and I to reconnect. Only one person required minor transcript revisions. Some participants spoke about days of significance (i.e. December holidays, birthdays) as they recounted their stories. If I had a moment, especially if social media such as Facebook alerted me of a participant’s birthday, I sent an emoji or a brief, general birthday message for instance. Some participants I never saw or heard from again following the initial thank you emails and their approval of their transcripts. The interview process and post interview has been quite uneventful with no logistical challenges arising.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Catherine Kohler Riessman’s *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (2008) provides a comprehensive description of what thematic analysis is and how it works. Thematic analysis is not concerned with the form of the body story as much as it is concerned with its thematic meaning. As Riessman explains, “interrogating the particular language a speaker selects is not relevant to their purpose; focus is on the act the narrative reports and the moral of the story (62). According to Riessman, there is a focus on generating thematic categories across individuals even as individual stories are preserved and grouped in chunks or compared against one another. Significant to thematic analysis as opposed to grounded theory for instance is that prior theory serves as a resource for interpretation of my participants’ body stories in thematic analysis. Thematic analysis also lends itself to being able to make connections between the individual story or interview being shared with the researcher and the larger co-existing social structures

influencing these stories such as power relations, hidden inequalities and historical contingencies (76).

I utilized thematic analysis for my interview transcripts. Thematic analysis interrogates *what* is spoken (or written) more so than *how* it is said (Riessman, 2008:19). Riessman encourages researchers to sit with the messiness of narrative methods of inquiry, such as thematic analysis, and to adapt them for our own research studies. Some features of thematic analysis include its examination of primarily what content a narrative communicates rather than precisely how a narrative is structured to make points to an audience (i.e. the researcher); its rejection of generic explanations and instead an aim to historicize the narrative accounts of my participant; and the role of prior theories, which serve as a resource for interpretation of my participants body stories. Through thematic analysis, my participants' body stories were interpreted as a whole and also in bounded segments in relation to one another's interview (Riessman, 2008: 74). It is their experiences, histories, and the meanings they attach to social interactions and objects of significance imbued with symbolic and material meaning that thematic analysis can help unearth.

Driven by the repetition of their concerns, I describe the comments made in the interviews in descending order of frequency of repetition. According to Ryan & Bernard's article "Techniques to Identify Themes" (2003), observing and recording repetition of certain words, comments and ideas serves as an essential tool for identifying themes, subthemes, and reoccurring areas of participant interest in qualitative interviews. For the purpose of my interviews, key participant comments centered the thematic topics of fat/ness, blackness, family, schooling, strangers, intimate relationships, workplace, activisms, objects such as their clothing, actions such as skin-bleaching, significance of their skin and how, when and in which context

different participants discussed these themes. For some participants, memories of family dominated their body stories, while for others there was a critical focus on the workplace or schooling institution. In chapters five and six the discussion chapters, these themes are reorganized into overarching themes social interactions, social forces and ad(dressing) identity with regards to participants' accommodation, resistance, self-definition and self-valuation practices and reflections.

My interviews were transcribed verbatim for each participant. As an attempt to try to 'internalize' each participant's audio, I listened to each interview seven to ten times, which amounted to anywhere from 10-20 hours of initial listening per interview, in an attempt to feel the interview. During other hearings, I just listened as though I was listening to the dialogue of a favourite movie in hopes to capture viscerally the essence of the interview. I have reflected on my own battles with anxiety and whether or not this played a role in my decision to approach audio review in this manner. Along with listening deeply and repetitively to each interview, I took copious hand- written notes outlining themes, words/phrases, patterns, ideas and pauses generated in each of the interviews and particularly recorded similarities and differences between the participants' body stories. I also recorded any 'aha moments' or feelings I reflected on post interviews. Despite encouragement to use contemporary software, I felt strongly about reviewing, highlighting and organizing my interview transcripts by hand as an attempt for my body to "memorize" the work.

My memorization goal proved to be rather lofty. I've still had to revisit audio, my handwritten and typed notes throughout the project at times while navigating ulnar nerve entrapment. However, I do feel more confident in and attached to this work when I am intimately writing as opposed to typing it. I've also had to incorporate necessary breaks for pain

management. Writing and education theorists have suggested handwritten notes as opposed to typing can produce increased memory recall (Smoker, Murphy et.al., 2009). I covered most of the walls in our condo unit with giant sticky notes[46] so I could graph, map and neon marker colour-code each participant's conversation paying close attention to documenting key segments of the interviews where essential themes such as family, workplace, education, relationships, social interactions, fashion/dress, fatness, blackness, and their skin's significance emerged in the participants' body stories. I also made both mental and informal handwritten notes reflecting on each participant interview's 'personality' – my rapport with the particular participant, the use of humor during the interview, and the general efficacy of the interview.

Participant Profiles

My seven participants ranged in age from 29 to 39 years of age. Some were born and raised in Toronto, others have migrated to the city. Some participants identify as mixed race and/or with mixed ethnic backgrounds while others identify as second-generation Canadians born of immigrant parents hailing from Caribbean islands or countries in the African continent. Some participants identify with the term "Black" as both their personal and political way of identifying themselves. Others identify as, "African-Canadian," "African" or African and Caribbean. Race as a social construct is further understood as some participants, similar to debates raised in scholarship on Blackness in Canada (Wane & Deliovsky et. al., 2002; Walcott, 2003), discuss limitations of the label "Black" in terms of its phenotypical, ancestral and geographic boundaries. These variations, as the variations in their body stories suggest, impact how participants experience their embodiment. Furthermore, for those who have migrated to

[46] Participants were identified on the wall notes by numbers indicating the order of their interviews. Not even the pseudonyms were included since I share my condo space.

Toronto, their body stories may offer newer insight to previous literature investigating how migrants negotiate identity and their body image through processes of acculturation and their resistance of or desire to assimilate to the body ideals outside of their previous home locations (Nasser & Katzman et al., 2001; Piran & Levine et al., 1999; Poran, 2002, 2006).

I interviewed my seven participants during the summer of 2014. Each interview was a maximum of two hours. Below are brief profiles of each participant detailing aspects *(ad)dressing* participants' perception of race, gender, size and other significant subjectivities, which at times allude to the interview information shared in Chapter 4 and the deeper arising themes in Chapter 5 and 6.

Participant #1: "Becky"

Becky, 34, is a self-identified Black, fat, working class woman living in Toronto who explains her relationship with her body as complicated and an ongoing journey. Becky was born in Toronto, along with her siblings; her parents who also live in Canada were born in the Caribbean and migrated to Canada in the 1970s. She currently identifies as fat and explains generously in the interview where and how that shift in naming has occurred. She is in a same-sex-sex relationship and works in the television industry, which she describes as a predominantly white, thin-bodied environment where everyday and systemic racism is rampant and often results with few people of colour in the industry especially in senior decision making and development roles. Her exclusive mode of transportation is the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and she reports having been verbally and physically assaulted on the TTC because of both her race and her size. Becky is heavily invested in fashion, clothing and her aesthetic presentation. She says being put together is crucial for her and how she's perceived by others. As a fat, Black woman,

Becky says she has found relative solace in the fatshion (fat fashion) blogging community. While she reports that this community is not without systemic issues of inequity and racial underrepresentation, which Becky elaborates on in the interview, she says it is a space where she feels she can see some size diversity represented. Becky speaks extensively about her family history including her family member's own issues with their bodies, instances of discrimination experienced, being outed as queer, dealing with certain family members and their homophobia towards her, temporary homelessness, fat phobic, sexist and racist interactions at work, and the relationship she has with particular objects, such as a denim jacket she routinely wears in public spaces such as her workplace or out socializing when she feels less comfortable in her skin or fears she might be policed because of her size, and how these have helped her address, shape and navigate her identity as a fat, Black woman in Toronto.

With respect to the snowball method, Becky was one of the early-identified participants. I reached out to Becky in person and directly asked her to participate in the project as I was aware of Becky's previous engagement in Toronto's fatshion community. Becky, upon receiving assurance that her identity would remain anonymous immediately agreed to the study. Becky recommended I reach out to Steff and also "Lexis," who she had cast on a television show previously.

Participant #2: Steff

Steff, 29 is a self-identified bisexual, Wiccan, middle-class and biracial (Black & white) woman living in Toronto who grew up in one of the city's more affluent neighbourhoods. She hates the word "fat" and equates it in its vitriol to the "N word." Her ancestry is African, Norwegian and Dutch. Her mother, who is deceased, was Black and her father is white. She has

a sister. She is a singer, actor, model, and bartender for nine years who runs an event staffing company. Steff describes how she has been discriminated against, not hired, or hired and quickly fired as a bartender due to her body size. She currently has what she describes as a complicated relationship with her body, which she states she doesn't like at all now. However, she still identifies as a "positive body image champion," still highly invested in motivating herself and other women to love themselves. She identifies herself as being very powerful and highly intelligent. Steff chose to pursue her artistic career instead of pursuing law school. She states that the world's perception of her, "would be feminine but with a definite masculine undertone if you're going to just go basic Western sort of stereotypical definitions of how [she] performs and presents [her] femininity." Steff, who did not want to be anonymous, both accommodates and resists oppressive body ideals through her attempts to buck the system by her physical presence, her dress, and her participation in public events such as the Toronto Pride Parade for example. Steff, like my first participant also elaborates generously in her interview about how she feels her body is read, the politics of clothing, her experience of different traumas from girlhood, including rape and gender-based violence, to adulthood and her various interactions with family, friends and strangers and how these have impacted the way she walks in her world in terms of both her racial identity, queerness and her size. Steff also has strong opinions about "putting herself together" and how she presents herself aesthetically in the world. She discusses her feelings about fatshion as a contested space for truly liberating women who identify as outside of the dominant thin body and beauty ideal. At the suggestion of Becky, I emailed Steff to request her participation and she immediately agreed to take part. Steff and I have shared space and participated in Toronto-based body positivity community events and projects.

Participant #3: "Amina"

Amina, 39, self-identifies as a Black "tomboy femme" queer, African Black Jamaican, working class, "broke ass," and an orphan and runaway who left home at 16 years of age. She identifies as living with an "orphan identity." She grew up in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood of Toronto. Amina does childcare to help make ends meet and has also worked at a dating service. Her favourite phrase to describe herself is "fatty boom boom." Amina, like my previous participants also elaborates generously on her shifting perception of the word fat and her usage of the word in relation to her body. She noted that her relationship with fat and fatness "changes" as her fat body changes with age. Amina draws on her Black and Jamaican cultural roots to feel better about herself at times when she feels down but she adds that being fat and Black is a "double whammy" because it rests outside of socially normalized ideals of embodiment.

Amina reflects deeply on specific family interactions as being pivotal to the way she learned to see and feel about her blackness and fatness from childhood. She openly states that she did not have a healthy relationship with her parents and currently does not have a relationship with them. From internalized racism, to respectability politics and her parents desire to "keep up with the jones,'" Amina always knew she fell short of her parents' aesthetic dreams for her because of her darker skin tone, thick hair texture and her fat size, as neither parent shied away from letting her know through verbal abuse. Amina, speaks candidly about traumas experienced throughout her lifetime and also speaks about the hypocrisy, as she names it, that she has experienced within the "so-called fat activism community" especially the queer fat activism community where she believes many talk the talk around fat liberation and acceptance but when it comes to their dating choices, fat desirability isn't present. Amina speaks on dating

while fat, clothing, dress politics and being put together, and the way in which socio-economic barriers have prevented her from participating in the construction of the "good" fat body through contemporary, often too expensive, plus size clothing she cannot access. Like my other participants, Amina also participates in online fat community and offers rich descriptions of her experience with this. While she identifies the internet as a "game changer" for accessing fat positivity and therefore feeling better about herself and more connected to ally communities, she also does not own a personal computer so her access is limited.

With respect to the snowball method, I met Amina at a community group held at University of Toronto St. George campus and later told her about the project via email. She immediately agreed to participate. Amina also told "Fancy" about my work and also recommended I connect with "Nana." Nana and Fancy both agreed to participate.

Participant #4: "Nana"

Nana, 35, self-identifies as fat and Black and as Ghanaian. She identifies herself as "bisexual/lesbian." She was raised with her two parents and siblings in a working/lower middle-class home even though she thought in her head as a child that she was upper class because she never wanted for anything. In Nana's home her physical body was never a problem. Her fatness and Blackness were something to be both adored *and* adorned. Although there were moments where Nana felt not Black enough in one space but too Black in another, when it came to her body's corporeality, this was not an area that she felt was a problem for her. Nana reflects on experiences she's had in school where she says she was actually quite popular, and the ways in which she's navigated her identity in different spaces; made and later eliminated certain friends who couldn't understand why she was so positive in her skin, and the clothing choices she continues to make which also affirm her feelings about her body as something she refuses to

hide. Nana associates her size with her taking up space, which for her comes with "huge currency." Nana, unlike other participants stressed the salient point that she has "chosen" her body. She doesn't participate as much in fat activism as she feels it to be a space that particularly produces a "woe is me" narrative which she refuses to entertain. However, she is very deliberate with her friend and community network and also loves to be the center of attention in any room she is in. She doesn't shy away from attention as she knows her body is often the largest in the room and is immediately seen by others. Nana discusses her dating preferences, how and why she attracts older white men, and also details the physicality of her ideal woman since she says she wouldn't date someone who looks like her. She often travels to find her clothing as she feels Canada is often behind the mark in contemporary fashion options for fat bodies. Nana speaks extensively about the significance of her skin and stresses that for her she has no time for asking the status quo for acceptance, which she feels is at the heart of many fat activism spaces. As noted, I connected with Nana through Amina.

Participant #5: "Pat"

Pat, 36, self-identifies as a Black heterosexual woman. She was raised in a working-class family but with a "middle-class mentality." Over the last 25 years, Pat has identified as a pescatarian, vegetarian and vegan. As an adult, Pat now identifies as a working middle class woman who owns her car and more than one property. Born and raised in the GTA, she grew up in Scarborough and has also lived in Mississauga. Her parents are from Trinidad. Pat says her mother's policing of her stomach is particularly influential to her current body story. Pat elaborates on the many occasions at school, the workplace, the grocery store and on public transit when she has felt scrutinized for being a fat Black woman via racist microaggressions,

which for her includes accusations of being the "Angry Black Woman" trope. Pat reports that her memories of childhood bullying have been particularly traumatizing for her in terms of her adult intimate relationships and trust building. Pat says that being a Black woman means being subject to immense scrutiny and she explains the ways in which she feels her body responds to what she refers to as "white violence." She also vividly recounts memories of her body, especially her stomach – an area mentioned by several participants – and how she has been policed by individuals from family to strangers.

Similar to previous participants, Pat's clothing and how she puts herself together is crucial to her navigation everyday and especially in the workplace. Pat states that she "plays into" femininity because she recognizes that she is less invisible when she does. She has sworn off of wearing pants for this reason and makes conscious decisions to be very "hyper feminine" in her clothing and undergarment selections. Pat also speaks to fat desirability and her own experiences with having sex while fat, online dating, community activism, and shopping online, which she hates. I first met Pat when I was interviewed on a Toronto-based radio show several years ago. I connected with her via email and she immediately agreed to be a participant.

Participant #6: "Lexis"

Lexis, 34 is a Black woman, burlesque performer, and former sex worker who still maintains the sex worker identity. She is pansexual and was born and raised in Toronto. Her dad and mom are from the Caribbean, Barbados and Jamaica respectively. They both immigrated in the early 1960s and met in Toronto. She left home as a teenager and did not complete high school after attempts at alternative schooling. Her family she identifies, like my previous participants, is seminal to her shared body stories. Lexis has two twin sisters, ten years her senior

and Lexis is in an open marriage. Although her husband's family is what she describes as upper middle class to wealthy, Lexis identifies herself individually as working class. She has a self-proclaimed "hyperfeminine" identity and enjoys showing off her body because she says she is aware of, and likes to tap into, the social currency that she has experienced as a Black woman when she participates in certain feminine performances. She was raised Christian but she has no current religious practice. She "falls back" on Christianity when necessary. Lexis strategically stays within communities where she feels safer (i.e. kink and burlesque communities) and is often weary of how her body will be read in additional spaces such as the "well heeled" expensive and exclusive restaurants she may visit with her husband. Lexis, like the other participants, elaborate on varying situations where they have had their fat bodies "read" unwantedly. She has also experienced significant trauma and in particular childhood bullying and feelings of undesirability, which she says has had a significant impact on her dating choices today. She also expresses that she is often hypervigilant, expecting a body reading with or without one. Lexis has a complicated relationship with her body's "changing fat" and also discusses how clothing, and her ability to make her own clothes, has afforded her with more access to fashionable clothing that fits her shapely figure as opposed to mainstream plus size clothing that's often "shaped like a box and matronly." As mentioned earlier, Becky recommended I connect with Lexis.

Participant #7: "Fancy"

Fancy, 31, is a heterosexual woman who comes from a well-established family "on paper." Both her parents are professors with multiple degrees between them and countless awards and recognitions worldwide. Fancy, quickly identifies her family as a key source of her

complicated relationship with her body and the experiences she has encountered. Fancy, as an individual, is on Ontario Works and identifies as working class. She comes from a Christian, Islamic, African background. While she identifies as Black, she also feels this label is limiting. Fancy was born in Nigeria and has travelled extensively. By 20 years of age she had been raised in three different countries. She went to Carleton University and studied Film Studies before moving to Toronto in 2012. Fancy speaks candidly about the "Black glass ceiling in Canada" as she reflects on her difficulties with having access to the experiences of excellence she feels her parents have been able to access in the United States where they currently reside.

Fancy also identifies as having mental health challenges and has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, anxiety and depression. Fancy speaks candidly about her experiences with trauma, especially sexual trauma, on multiple occasions by men she's trusted personally and professionally during different stages of her life. Fancy does not like to speak about her body and often uses other people's body stories as examples because this for her, is less invasive. Fancy's body became fat due to medication for mental health. Therefore, she has expressed her journey in coming to terms with her changing body and those around her and names her aunt in particular for helping her learn to see the significance in the skin she is in. Fancy, like my other participants also speaks extensively about the ways in which she feels she's had to "present" herself and "put herself together" in terms of her clothing choices in order to preserve her safety and her self esteem as she navigates her world. I connected with Fancy through Amina.

In conclusion, this methodology chapter detailed my rationale for conducting qualitative interviews with my seven participants. As a feminist researcher, I also explained how I proceeded to create an appropriate, comfortable and as safe as possible, setting for each participants' body story to unfold through the interviews. This was largely met by reviewing the

consent form, participant rights and project objectives with each participant in person. While there were unique differences, many of their body stories had shared experiences. The methodology chapter concluded with brief profiles of each participant which will help contextualize significant pieces of their body stories shared next in Chapter 4 Participant Body Stories & Reflections. Although the interviews were unstructured in that there was no interview schedule prearranged for each participant to follow, participants spoke intimately and conversationally about experiences with fatness, Blackness, social interactions at work or school or with family for instance, experiences of trauma, the significance of their skin and the importance of clothing and self-fashioning to their lived body stories among others. The project's Participant Interview Informed Consent Form, three general probes and the participants reflections on their social interactions were used to help establish the moments and connections documented next.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT BODY STORIES & REFLECTIONS

Through conversational, unstructured in-depth interviews, participants shared aspects of their body stories with me. Their accounts, listened to and understood through an intersectional, feminist, anti-racist lens, helped illuminate the influence of their varying life interactions on their corporality. Participants reflected on their historical memories spanning from Black girlhood, adolescence to contemporary Black womanhood. The participants came to the interview willing to reflect on a variety of issues that were raised in the Participant Interview Informed Consent Form, which they received before the interview. In addition, the consent forms were reviewed, read aloud, with participants in person prior to the start of each interview to ensure that they knew their rights as human participants. This ethical step also had another purpose. Along with the participant email and/or phone pre-interview I conducted with participants before the actual in-person meeting, reviewing the consent form provided an opportunity to refresh participants on the purpose of the research, which also helped situate the potential probes of the interview. The consent form included the following statement:

> This study seeks to understand further a) how self-identified females[47] living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) make sense of their body's fatness and/or Black darker skin pigmentation and b) how these embodiments influence the way they think of and 'experience' their bodies through their everyday interactions. This study seeks to understand how females with 'bodies of excess' that challenge so-called 'body boundaries,' whether through their fatness or blackness or both, have negotiated their

[47] The word 'female' was heavily problematized in my dissertation proposal. The use of the word here is strictly to state verbatim what was mentioned on the consent form (2014). It does not represent terminology used in the current iteration of the study (2018).

body identities through their life histories, experiences, and the meanings/reflections participants attach to those experiences and life histories. Two primary areas this study focuses on are fat fashion (plus size shopping), reasons around particular clothing selections, and/or skin bleaching.

Thus, three general probes, 1. life histories, 2. contemporary experiences, including social interactions and objects of significance in regards to this research topic, and 3. reflections on and meaning making of these experiences, were raised in the consent form. Due to the conversational nature of the interview, my participants discussed some interview probes more at length than others. For example, all seven participants spoke about their body experience, perceptions and feelings through historical references to exchanges with family members and friends, memories of interactions at school or in the workplace environment with colleagues and clients, and embodied experience in varying contexts, from encounters with random strangers in grocery stores or on public transit to intimate encounters with love interests. Equally, all participants discussed clothing and the significance of their adult self-fashioning choices – 'putting themselves together' – to their identities. In some cases, the women retold vivid childhood stories related to their clothing and its impact on their sartorial choices today as well as on their overall feelings about their bodies. While only one participant spoke intimately about familial experiences with skin-bleaching, many participants discussed issues pertaining to skin tone, including their experiences with dark(er) or light(er) skin compared to other family members, friends or colleagues, the personal and social perils of colourism/shadeism, and the overall significance of their skin for them as Black fat women. Many spoke pointedly about their experiences with racism, micro aggressions, gender-based violence, such as physical and sexual

assault, and body and appearance-based discrimination as it related to both their body shape/size and skin colour among other aesthetics. Every participant's interview is essentially a retelling of many social interactions that have helped inform their body stories. Experiences and memories in and of fat/ness[48] emerged as the preeminent starting point for most of my participants' sharing of their body stories in both childhood and adulthood and as such, I start with an acknowledgement that all topics are intertwined. In essence, participants' offerings in their interviews emphasized or was intertwined with their experiences with fat and Black embodiment. There are many ways in which their offerings could be summarized, however, I have taken my cue from the participants.

The themes drawn from the participants' body stories are below and the division between them is artificial. From an intersectional perspective, many of these thematic subheadings 'bleed' into one another and are already intertwined with and nuanced by one another as the participants retell their body stories. This division is merely utilized here to help present their accounts accessibly to the reader. The messiness and interconnectedness of these forced divisions, and comments that may not fit these sub-categories will be revisited in chapters five and six the discussion chapters where I take up the overarching themes of the participant's body stories: social interactions, social forces and their means of self-definition, self-valuation through accommodating, resisting normative bodily norms and fashioning identity through their sartorial choices.

Out of these participants' stories, organized below in the chronological order of their interview[49], emerges the thematic break out of reoccurring themes that I explore more deeply in

[48] I use fat/ness for fat and fatness interchangeable. If there is an explicit rationale for using fat or fatness independently, I will elaborate as needed.

chapters five and six discussions. The themes I focus on are my participants' meaning-making of, and through, their diverse social interactions, the social forces that influence their lives, self-fashioning and their experiences of bodily traumas. I discuss their experiences in concert with literature and theoretical frameworks that influence this research project. These themes emerge from my reflection upon their stories and further consideration of their comments about life histories, sexuality, their community activisms/engagements (i.e. fatshion blogs), being "put together" sartorially and its symbolic, material currency in their lives, social and bodily traumas such as gender-based violence, anti-Black microaggressions and appearance-based discrimination. I consider the way in which these themes or *threads that bind* have influenced their body stories concerning how they experience, think through, and address their identities.

In each of the sections below, I recount the participants' thoughts on various topics all linked to their social interactions with significant or generalized others in their day to day in varying moments of their lives I start with the comments about fat or fatness, as that was a consistent presence in each participant's body story[50].

On Fat/ness:

Becky, 34, reports not always having a good relationship with fat. "Two years prior to this interview, I would have never wanted to be described as fat. However, now I can call myself fat. It's a description." According to Becky, she has previously associated fat with failure and more so disappointment. As an adolescent, Becky would sometimes not eat in order to monitor her weight. "I was in Grade 9…I lost 20 lbs by not eating breakfast for a month. I'd also exercise excessively so I could eat whatever I wanted and still look good…of course all the weight came

[50] Participant name and age in order of interviews: Becky, 34; Steff, 29; Amina, 39; Nana, 35; Pat, 36; Lexis, 34; Fancy, 31

back." Today, although better, she says her relationship with fat remains complicated. "I credit my supportive partner, my online blogging, size activism, and the fatshion community for my growing comfortability with my fatness." Becky says that her changing fat sometimes challenges her; for example, when her fat redistributes to other parts of her body such as her stomach. "Every time I've gained weight it's taken a while to love it again… I get to a place where it's okay then I gain more weight. I don't always like my body so I have to learn to re-love …my bigger tummy …I'm trying to learn to love my new tummy and bottom because I don't want it to prevent me from walking in the world and having confidence or wearing what I want because I'm worried of what others will think." Becky speaks extensively about how she feels colleagues view her fat, Black body. "I often wonder if they are looking at me …judging my body…do they think I look good or I look good *for* a fat Black girl." As such, Becky invests significant time in how she "dresses her fat" and how she "puts herself together" she says so she can look her best and feel the best about her fat body she says. Becky has gone through significant events in her life that were traumatic such as having to leave home when she was outed as queer. During these traumatic times Becky says she gained additional weight due to sadness and feelings of rejection. "I ate more bread and porridge because they were cheaper. I gained more weight and I remember just sleeping a lot…it's like I was living outside of my body not even aware of its growing fatness. I was so numb."

Steff, 29, identifies herself as a positive body image champion. She has a complicated relationship with her body and admits not liking it right now. "The reason why I've had to learn to love my body is because I've hated it… but in order to survive I had to turn that around." She hates the word fat and holds it in the same unredeemable regard as the N word – whether one uses 'nigga' or 'n*gger' she says. According to Steff, "Fat is a horrible word. I hate the word.

There's a whole movement towards reclaiming the word fat…take for instance *fat*shion… I can't get on board with this. It's not something I believe we should be reclaiming. The word is akin to the N word and I don't think it should ever be used as an acceptable descriptive of a person." Steff, who identifies herself as biracial and bisexual, says she "walks the line" on many things explaining that people can't easily "put their finger" on her sexuality, her fashion sense, how she plays with gender expression, or her ethnicity, however, her fatness never gets misperceived. "Fat never goes androgynous. It never slips away, it never gets misperceived…Something so baseline as what my body is composed of will run into the way that people handle me, perceive me, or dismiss me at times, or *try* to dismiss me." As a bartender for 9 years, she mentions she's experienced size discrimination. "If you're working high-end bars they won't hire you if you're 'fat.' It doesn't matter how sexy you are. I'll be hired sight unseen, a day later I'm let go, they say they're downsizing, and the next day three thin girls half my quality are hired." According to Steff, dark-skinned Black girls who are thin will get hired before fat girls. She also spoke about night clubs that turn away fat girls in the lineup no matter how well dressed they are. "The same clubs will quickly accept thin girls not nearly as 'well put together,' even inebriated," she says which Steff explains is against the law.

Steff reflects on her childhood and the many times she was teased because of her body. "Growing up I was teased by my peers, by people's parents, by gymnastic coaches – I was a gymnast in grade school – for being fat…I couldn't have been more active." She adds, "I was plus all my life and people were always trying to hint at reducing me, whittling me down to be normal or to fit into society's norms…even normal clothing." At 13 years of age, Steff was diagnosed with depression, was a cutter and attempted suicide many times. She was also raped at 13. "I still fight depression to this day and 90% of it stems from my body image. Ninety percent

of that stems from what I dealt with as a kid." Although she went to predominantly white schools in more affluent neighbourhoods, as a young teen she welcomed the attention of West Indian and "hip hop community" boys and men, often 15 years her senior, who she met in neighbourhoods she would visit because she felt invisible to the white boys. Steff says her larger body was viewed as more mature and in hindsight was probably being oversexualized by older men preying on her. "I wasn't enough for the boys in my grade. I wasn't enough for the boys in my school. I was too much is the joke. ... I think of how we raise children now … if I had been given a different perspective on my own body and my own worth earlier, I don't know that it would have been such a hard and messy navigation to get to who I am now." In terms of her childhood friendships, Steff reports that when she started hanging out with more Black friends she began to like her body more. "Hanging with Black guys and some sort of urban girls all of a sudden, I became sexy, desirable and my larger size made people not want to mess with me. We became rough and tumble and my size made me powerful. It was an advantage."

Steff shares many moments where she finds her fatness on display impacts how people interact with her. Steff has received compliments at Caribana and Pride festivals. "People are surprised because I'm big, beautiful, brassy and wearing next to nothing." Steff also attends yoga classes where she says she isn't afraid to be seen. "I sit front row centre constantly on display when they expect me to sit at the back…the big girl." Steff says this is how she tries to live every day. "Being on display…it's the only way I feel empowered to be honest… it's actually bucking the system of how I am expected to be and behave… I could either shrink into a corner and die literally or I can push forward." Steff adds that the compliments she'd get in spaces like Pride occur where the marchers are all wearing the same outfits, doing the same dances, but because she's big, people say how "brave" she is. "People give me compliments but there's a part of me

that takes it as a barb…a jab. What do you mean I'm amazing? Confident? Because I'm fat and daring to wear a crop top…?"

In terms of dating and desirability, Steff says her husband has never called her fat in an argument though many of her exes have. Women she says, "don't usually do that" in general. With men, she says she tends to be more dominant sexually, and in the relationship generally. She adds that she is immediately more submissive with women.

> …being assaulted so young I'm so respectful of women's personal space, their bodies, their sexuality I'm usually a submissive. Because of my size, I'm tall, I'm strong, and I am powerful… I'm often expected to be the stud even if I'm a femme…I'm expected to take the lead in the relationship which has led me to some horrible embarrassing like preteen stalemates where neither of us will make the first move…or I'll just quietly wait to hold her when I really want to jump her fuckin' bones."

Amina's 39, favourite affirming word to describe herself is "fatty boom boom."

> As much as I have come to heal and enjoy fatness and… I know I live in a society that doesn't see it that way… I referred to myself as fat and a friend of mine said, 'don't say that about yourself…don't put yourself down…' I said, 'I'm not putting myself down…I mean fat and proud.

Amina further adds that when her fat body changes she has to get used to it. “There are many ways to be fat as you age and your body shape changes that’s a whole other thing.” Amina was fat “hourglass” shaped and now she isn’t.

> I go through stages in healing, enjoying and accepting my fat and then my body changes and I have to get used to it again but age is also power. As I get older I also get more comfortable in my skin and to some degree I’m able to say ‘fuck it.’ There’s a power that comes with age. I still love and accept myself. That skill and capacity is not as developed when you’re younger…and especially if you weren’t brought up to love and accept yourself.

Amina recounts her fatness was a constant issue for her parents.

> I never had much solace as a child. I was always aware of the level of internalized racism that my parents had, like the self hate that they had and how vicious it was and how they turned that towards me. Because I was, I was that which they were trying not to become: dark, fat, chubby, whatever.

Her parents had a gathering with other African and Caribbean family friends, as Amina ran around in her yellow shorts outfit, one of them commented on how fat she was. “My parents didn’t defend me. They looked mortified… I was tarnishing their respectable image.”

In terms of Amina’s childhood relationship with her parents, she says that it impacts her adult relationships which are also coloured by her self-acquired orphan identity. Amina insists

that regardless of how close she is to friends, it's not the same as having a biological family. In her opinion, you never lose the "orphan identity." She never has. "Like racism, like classism and the other things that intersect with your body identity, the orphan identity just becomes another one…especially if your body doesn't conform to what is considered ideal." Amina also explains the reactions some people have had to her sharing about her orphan identity. People who feel she shouldn't speak "badly" about her parents. Currently, Amina says she tells people her parents are dead to prevent the stigma of the orphan identity or having to disclose that she doesn't come from a good family. "I don't need people using my orphan identity on top of me being fat as evidence of me being irreparably flawed or something…some people don't want to be your friend because you are fat and because of your socio-economic status especially if you're broke." Financial and other status markers also impact Amina's intimate relationships.

In terms of dating, Amina says she doesn't date women in Toronto anymore because it's all about status. "I've been more exoticized from white queer women than any straight guy. Some of the women just want to know what it's like to be with a Black girl…Some of them treat women like bitches." According to Amina, many queer women, especially those in fat activism, they do lip service and write papers but don't see fat bodies as desirable. Amina says, "there is political fat acceptance and then desirable fat acceptance." Amina's ex-girlfriend broke up with her because of her size. According to Amina, her ex wanted to "elevate herself" and lose weight so staying with Amina at the size she was became problematic for her. "I'm telling you, queer women's community is very fatphobic. There might be moments in time or pockets around progress… But it's like one step forward, 20 steps back …combine this with race and socio-economic status prejudice, it's getting worse." Amina expressed her frustrations with dating and

as someone who identifies as a “broke ass” it is very difficult for her to compete in the dating arena with the additional aesthetic and economic barriers.

> If I cannot dress my fat body well dating is difficult. Vanity is a problem… but when you’re prepared to discard someone because their shoes aren’t that great… … Dressing put together costs money…and sometimes by the time I save the money and track the item down it’s gone.

Amina credits online fat activism with helping her feel better about herself. From fashion blogs where she can see someone who looks somewhat like her, to the academic HAES (Health at Every Size) community and other fat activists she’s connected to, these things have helped her build some fat community.

> The internet has been a game changer…if only I had it in my teens and twenties. Even now I don’t have good computer access due to finances but it has changed my ability to battle with people who argue that I can’t be fit and fat. Articles, evidence, pictures of women online help me hugely…taking in images of women who have my body in a positive light that helps.

Nana, 35, reports that she is proud of her fat and Black identity.

> I’m fat and I’m Black together [laughs] you know what I mean… In terms of how I manoeuvre in this world, I’m so very blessed to be African and have African parents. Our

> fat and Blackness were actually adored. That wasn't the status quo in white Newmarket where I lived but no matter what I knew that for us in Ghanaian culture fat women were chiefstresses. I'm the fucking universe.

Nana sees a privilege in her fatness during many social interactions. "If I go into a room of corporate white men 60 years old and more men I'm good… you will give me the keys to your house, your car… because without even knowing it you've Mammified me and you don't even realize you've done it…"

According to Nana, the space her fat body takes up is another privilege of fatness she enjoys.

> The significance of me the essence of who Nana is *is* that I take up space…I'll go into spaces and people will be drawn to me… not that I give a fuck whether you're okay with me or not… My body is accepted because of how I carry myself. Are you that woman burying herself in Black clothes, frumpalizing yourself, covering yourself, woe is me attitude… then that's what I'm going to think about you too … Like on a bus you might not want to sit next to me because of whatever. I don't care [laughs] because I don't even want you that close. If it's crowded and you decide not to sit next to me, I'm good with my own seat anyways… I'm not going to squeeze up myself.

On the topic of space when flying while fat, Nana says she doesn't believe economy planes need larger seats.

> I don't need economy to have [laughs] bigger seats, put me in first class with the bigger seats. They [bigger seats] already exist. In economy, I'll ask you for your two seat buckles and if the person beside me is uncomfortable, oh well shift yourself because me I'm good…I'm not making myself smaller. And furthermore, I don't pay for extra space. If you talk nicely a lot of flight attendants will come. I've had more flight attendants back me and be like, "I'll give you an upgrade."

According to Nana, the value of her space is, "pretty important, it's a lot of currency, it's very expensive." On one occasion, when Nana went to Ghana at 17 years of age, she lost a dramatic amount of weight due to plenty of walking to perform house chores, activities and the "beaming hot sun." She went from a clothing size 20 to 14. Nana received plenty positive reinforcement and compliments on her weight loss. "People who really knew me thought I was sick with the weight loss. Those who didn't, especially the White girls, complimented my weight loss. The weight loss didn't feel right on me. I gained back weight eventually my body went back naturally but I remember feeling like so uncomfortable that I was that small and it's the smallest I have ever been in my life, size 14 like… I was really uncomfortable." Working in finance and accounting, Nana says that how white clients read her fat, Black body seems to assist her professionally. "Not that I'm not good at what I do, I am, but people also want to trust me. I'm not saying it's only my shape but the vessel in which I'm in also helps me gain that trust, you know what I mean? I am what I am and I will play it."

Nana doesn't participate in fat activism because she believes its problematic in that it's "asking permission for us to exist."

> I've shied away from fat activism… because I'm not asking the so-called status quo for anything. I'm not trying to get skinny people's permission. I'm not against those who participate and some of those who create fat activism events have good intentions, but it still draws many of the fat 'woe is me' types…. I can see the benefit in being in fat activisms spaces where you can be free as you are, but not spaces where your insecurities meet someone else's insecurities to further on the insecurities [laughs].

Nana reflected on an old high school friend – a Black Jamaican girl. According to Nana, her friend's family often compared her body to other relatives. Her friend was shocked and jealous by how positive Nana was in her skin. "She would constantly knock me down like, 'well why are you so happy because we are both fat and black, I hate myself and you love yourself…what are you so fucking happy about?'" Nana says she never gave her a direct response but her actions, of proudly being herself, *was* the response.

> My actions were like [in my head], I can't even give you two seconds, I'm not going to try and cry with you." Nana, reflects generally on her schooling experience in terms of her fatness as uneventful. "I was the fat girl but it wasn't like "she's *the* fat girl," if that makes any sense. I just was. I was actually quite popular and stuff like that.

Nana, who identifies as sexually fluid, observed that while in Ghana with her two small size sisters, she was the sensual preference amongst admirers. "Everybody was, like, I'm their flavour… I had never gotten that here in the GTA or Newmarket. I really got to know the desirability of my body when I left this country [Canada]." Nana continues to mention that

places like Jamaica and Israel, as well as people from different ethnic communities, such as Greek and Italian, she finds are most responsive and desiring of larger bodies. Nana once had to tell her gay male friend to stop "standing up for her" when she'd be verbally attacked or laughed at on the street. "I told him, you're like standing up for me. It's cute whatever but stop it yeah because it's actually showing me how insecure about yourself you are and even ashamed of walking with me. I get these [insults] even when I'm alone so I'm good."

For Nana, she's often met queer and fluid suitors in heterosexual spaces and heterosexual suitors in queer spaces. "The space – queer or hetero- does not influence who I meet or how I am. I am the same person in any space." Nana is not attracted to fat men or women who are very fat or with loose skin. However, with Black women, which she prefers, they need to be thick. "If we're looking in a room, I gravitate to that 5'9," 250-pound thick Black girl or I gravitate towards that light skin, big hair girl because she's just so cute." Nana says she wouldn't date herself because she prefers them taller, with an ass, which she says she doesn't have, and with more shape, which she doesn't think she has.

> I am not as shapely as I would like but I can't help that so I don't try to [laughs]. You could be a size 32 but with shape, you have to have an ass. I don't have one [laughs]… I want a shelf [an ass] to lay things on [laughs] just saying…No fat dudes for me either...I'm already fat enough for us both. It's okay [laughs] but girls? Different story.

Pat, 36, is aware of stereotypes of fat Black women as loud, aggressive and inarticulate so as a response, she "will speak very kindly, polite, and 'nice things up' in order to be listened to" in person or even on the phone where she says they cannot see her fatness but they might suspect

she sounds Black. “It’s a strategy and it works.” Pat also feels her body isn’t seen as desirable in community spaces. “Within hip hop, artistic, healing communities…my size is seen as a caregiver body in terms of being seen as a nurturer by others … that’s a big problem for me, a certain desexualisation…I’ve never dated anyone within these circles.” Pat describes herself as fat if she feels safe in the space.

> If I’m at the radio show I’ll use fat because I know they wouldn’t throw it back in my face…If I’m holding power I use the word fat. If I’m not sure or don’t have access to power I’ll use ‘full figured’ such as with a doctor especially if it’s not my own family doctor…

Pat shared experiences she’s had with her mother, school peers, and strangers that she finds pivotal to how she feels about her body and her concern with its “proportion and balance.”

> If there was a genie who could take 10 lbs off my stomach today I’m not going to lie…I’d do it. Because I’m buying clothes that make me feel a lot better, I don’t fixate on it as much… I do make every attempt to like be present at least once a week in my body with a bra on, underwear and naked…

Pat’s stomach is central to her proportional concerns.

> Sometimes what I do is I anticipate, like if I eat something and my stomach swells, how will my body look in these clothes? I also have fibroids so I want to have a smaller stomach so I'd know if something was going wrong… I used to have issues around my arms but I don't anymore… I think the stomach is an issue because my legs are so much skinnier. I think if I had like bigger hips and wider legs it probably wouldn't bother me... My stomach bothers me because it's connected to desirability and sexiness and it all comes back to me wanting a more proportioned body.

Pat says she's been told from childhood by her mother to be hyper vigilant of her stomach. In her twenties, she also remembered overhearing a guy at a club say she had a big stomach. Pat, who described herself as a nerd, was student council president, played football and was part of the leadership group in high school. She was bullied at 19 years of age by a Black boy and other Black boys who would join in on bullying her verbally because she was fat. "I remember having to walk past those guys to get to the student council…I'd be so nervous." She was also called a "bitch" by a white boy who took theatre. Pat's experience being bullied in high school by boys because she was fat continues to impact her dating life two decades later. In Pat's last relationship she told her boyfriend about her adolescent bullying along with the clumsiness that her anxieties have fostered. "Because of how I was treated by the boys in my school, today, as an adult I sometimes can't discern when men are giving me authentic compliments or trying to pick me up…I'm often on the defense." Although she feels good about herself she never quite 'feels' people's desire towards her due to that adolescent bullying experience at 19. Due to her size in her opinion, she's had concerns about recreating positions in sexual encounters and recently took up yoga to help with flexibility. "If I can't do something I'll let the [yoga instructor] person

know." She does wonder sometimes about the correlation between fatness and fitness: she started doing yoga and her then sexual partner made a positive comment about her increased flexibility. "The correlation when I was exercising and stretching my bodies in ways where um – but – the sex is not only better for me, it was better for him too, right?"

Pat says she wrote a play about her experiences with body shaming but never told her mom about it. As an adult, Pat has facilitated body image workshops, created a Tumblr account to talk about her own body and subscribes to many sites that celebrate fat Black women online. "In terms of seeing other Black women in like very sexy outfits. They show me how I can re-imagine how I can dress myself, um, that other women have the courage to put themselves out there? Not just professional shots of plus-sized women models, but like selfies of everyday women."

Lexis, 34, says she has a "hyperfeminine identity and enjoys showing off her body." "I enjoy my body being very sexual…getting closer to a feminine ideal. For me it is very much that curvy silhouette…which I naturally have… I'm not a straight up and down person looking for curves. I've got the curves." Lexis likes to engage in what she calls a certain "level of feminine performance" that she goes through and often enjoys even though she sometimes finds it tedious. According to Lexis, "larger bodies as well as darker skinned bodes...um Black bodies are most marginalized and are told they're the least attractive." Lexis says she's most connected to communities where she receives positive body assurance. In other spaces, Lexis feels she can't readily guarantee that her body will be seen as great. For example, while riding her tricycle a random guy said to her, "you can do it" and she felt this was him assuming she was riding to lose weight, which she wasn't. "I hate when people read my body as unfit when I'm actually very fit." Sometimes Lexis says her body takes up space in ways that she may not always like such as

when her buttocks bumps up against a table in a restaurant and how white people read her "as a bigger black person" and she wonders if they are thinking that she isn't appropriate or doesn't have the etiquette to be at a high-end restaurant with her husband for instance. "Will people think I don't have table manners or the ability to order from a nice menu… because I'm a bigger Black woman… Will I get a look…should I order less food?"

Lexis' says her weight has fluctuated over the years. She's noticed that people, in both queer and hetero spaces, will react when her body is thinner with compliments. As a burlesque performer, Lexis says,

> In queer spaces there may be a bit of hesitation in the compliment maybe because there is a bit more awareness around body politics and not 'calling out' weight loss but they still do it… What's implied by these comments is you look better thinner…But if I gain back 30 lbs nobody's saying you look great what did you do?

Lexis finds compliments from audience members about her being "brave as a larger performer" insulting and reflective of their own internalized fat stigma about what fat bodies can/can't or should/shouldn't do.

> I'd rather someone simply say I look great up there as opposed to complimenting my character…Going from 19 to 34 years old and having had weight fluctuations like my body changed significantly in front of an audience… because my performer body is public sometimes people can feel a certain ownership over it...People will tell me about the changes to my body weight. Some will express congratulations for my weight loss

> and others will express disappointment maybe because with my weight loss I look less like them.

Lexis explains an experience where her body wasn't fat enough. She had been asked to model for a life drawing class. When she showed up she says it was clear to her that her body didn't have enough curves. "I feel my body didn't have enough texture and interest… They wanted a fatter body with rolls." Lexis often asks her fitness trainer for a "bigger rounder booty" and she does feel that she gets a certain amount of currency from her more hour glass body shape and doesn't want to lose her curviness. "Sometimes I'm like wouldn't it be nice to get the fat sucked out of my stomach and pump it into my ass [laughs]."

Lexis isn't sure if she'd have plastic surgery if it were in her financial reach but she doesn't deny that it's possible she would do it. Lexis says sex work has helped her appreciate her body. "It gave me that sex worker identity... which is very much about feeling like it's okay to capitalize on my body… Money is the best aphrodisiac [laughs]." Lexis was smaller than she was now when she first began sex work and she recognizes it was likely easier for her to get hired because of that as opposed to being her larger size. For Lexis, the kink community is a space where she's been able to see her body as desirable.

> I think being a kinky person and identifying that way for a long time has definitely helped me to see like how my body is desirable… I think the great thing about kinky people is that we embrace things that may be different from the societal norm… I never feel now like I have to um try to change myself to find a lover.

Fancy, 31, who says she has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, anxiety and depression, says her fat is a direct response to the pills she's taken for her psychosis.

> I had gone up to 190 pounds from 130/140 pounds. So, for someone who's battling sexual trauma, who is battling having a mental health diagnosis, and then on top of that because of the pills you're all of a sudden, fat now? Um, I had to come back and see friends that I went to university with. They treated me differently… and now I'm fat… I've never been big before I was always slim and trim… The doctors don't tell you that when you take antipsychotics that they may make you crave sugar. They slow down your metabolism… I'm gaining 10-12 pounds a month.

She's been off her medications since 2013. Fancy says she had trouble coming to terms with her fat body but credits an aunt for helping her accept her body during her psychosis.

> I didn't like my body when I gained weight… but then I had an aunt and she said, you know, it's not about your weight, it's about feeling and looking good. So, she encouraged me to wear makeup and, you know, she took me out, she bought me a few dresses and stuff. And that's something I learned from her, that it wasn't about how big I was, it was really about feeling good. That's something that I had to learn…if I didn't I don't think I'd be alive… I'd be dead a long time ago.

Fancy says that because she grew up in primarily white environments, she had many self-esteem issues. According to Fancy, she has struggled with feelings of worthlessness. Due to her experiences with racism, she's had panic attacks and dropped out of high school. Fancy says it

took her seven years to do a three-year degree because of sexual traumas she experienced. It is very hard for her to talk about her body and therefore she often reflects on other people's experiences.

> It's very difficult for me to talk about my body. I externalize a lot and use other people's situations instead of mine because it's less intrusive. It's difficult for me to talk about body image because that already suggests to me that I'm being 'cut up.' How do you feel about yourself? How do people see you and how do you wish to be seen? This is what we women are often struggling with… how we wish to be seen should be more important than any social standard.

Fancy also adds that for her solitude sometimes is also a form of nurturing herself and she uses her online space as a safer space. Fancy discussed social media and its role in perpetuating unrealistic body ideals. As a way of carving out her own space online, she uses photography, which she can control herself through the selfie. It also doesn't require another human in her physical space so she feels additionally safe.

> I'm my own photographer… I don't need a photographer there so it's safe. I don't have to worry about doing coke…I do a lot of selfies on Facebook and it's for my safety. I don't have to worry about my self-esteem being damaged like being assaulted by a photographer… Sometimes my selfie may not even be shared on Facebook and sometimes it is… Whenever I have issues with my self-esteem I go to my Facebook and I

> look at my photos and I can see, you're so beautiful, look how much you've grown, like those types of things. So, it's more about me than anyone else.

On Black/ness:

Becky, 34, speaks predominantly about her experiences as a Black, fat woman within the context of her workplace, which is in the television industry, and her engagement with fatshion blogging as both a consumer and blogger. Becky credits fatshion blogging communities with providing some benefits in terms of fat representation albeit predominantly white and says her esteem has increased since being in fat activism community spaces in Toronto. Although, she has created her own fatshion blog and feels positive in regards to the positive comments she'll get from some of her followers, she feels fatshion isn't an equally beneficial or fair space for Black fat women in Canada in terms of marketability.

> Nobody cares about fat, Black girls in Canada…if you're not white, blonde, fat and tacky you aren't considered a leader in fatshion…you are less likely to be the spokesperson selected by the large chain plus clothing stores and you're not getting the lucrative brand partnerships...The successful bloggers the Black ones…not their fault but they are light-skinned with curly hair. If she's actually dark she has a piece of weave in her head. You're not going to see the top blogger that looks like Precious."[51]

[51] Precious is the fictional character Gabourey Sidibe played in the 2009 African-American film *Precious*. The film chronicled the life of "Precious" a very fat, very dark-skinned, impoverished adolescent girl. Many have criticized the film for its stereotypical portrayal of blackness and fatness. The director Lee Daniels is a gay African-American man. Recently Sidibe has received significant press coverage over her decision to get weight loss surgery.

Becky speaks candidly about her experiences within an all white workplace such as when she was called Medea, a Tyler Perry movie character reference[52], by her colleague in reference to his assuming she looked intimidating and one "not to be messed with." Becky feels that colleagues often scrutinize her fatness and Blackness; they read and evaluate her fat, Black body. "I am always wondering what are they noticing on me? When they say someone half my size is fat or they talk only about 'skinny hot blondes,' what are they thinking about me?" explains Becky. "I've realized over the years that I will always be fat. I will always be Black."

For Steff, 29, although she is biracial, her Blackness wasn't readily noticed during her schooling. "I was mixed but I was never perceived as *the* mixed girl until I worked out what that meant to be mixed and started to use it towards my advantage because hip hop was on the rise in the 90s then and it was cool to be Black all of a sudden." Currently, Steff also discusses that according to what space she's in she's seen differently.

> In court I'm a woman of colour… 'whitifying' myself, speaking in you know a more proper tone…using million-dollar words I wouldn't use on a day-to-day basis…part in parcel of what they tell us is being 'professional' but really, it's about white-washing yourself… At Caribana all of a sudden, I'm putting on an accent and making sure my hair is out and curly so that they can see I'm mixed with *something*... suddenly I fit in.

[52] Tyler Perry's character Medea is the matriarch of the African-American family. She is portrayed as a stereotypically very fat, older woman, who isn't afraid to physically fight someone, essentially 'throwing her weight around' to tackle to the ground anyone in her way.

Steff describes it as becoming a chameleon. “You’re able to walk both sides Black and white…it almost becomes second nature…I don’t even realize I’m doing it a lot of the time anymore…It’s just what you do to survive, right, and to get by.”

Amina, 39, identifies her African tradition as a source of self-esteem as a fat Black woman.

> As much as its been eroded by racism and colonialism and you know western white racist media being so international, my African tradition is still very stubborn…I know where to find African people, spaces and culture in real life and online to reinforce. So that’s my strength.

She continues, “being fat and Black is still a double whammy I have to face when I go out on the street, when I meet people. Add to that economic issues.” Amina explains that the treatment she gets in stores is no different from the treatment she remembers Oprah Winfrey received when a store clerk at a high-end boutique in Zurich Switzerland refused to show Oprah a designer bag because she didn’t recognize her and as Amina says, “Oprah wasn’t wearing her ‘Oprah hair and makeup’ and wasn’t put together.” Amina says she didn’t have a close connection to her mom, who would always remind her she shouldn’t want to be fat on top of Black. “I remember my mom being horrified, screaming at me when I got darker in complexion after playing on a beach in Jamaica under the hot sun …This whole internalized racism thing… I’m a runaway and an orphan. I don’t have many pictures of myself as a child.”

Reflecting on her childhood**,** Nana says she had more trouble being seen as Black than fat. “Living in white suburbia I was often told I wasn’t Black enough. I wasn’t Black enough

going from Newmarket to Toronto where there would be a Black community. I wasn't Jamaican and I wasn't Trini (Trinidadian) which are like the predominant Black communities in Toronto and I don't sound like them at all [laughs]. Being judged as to whether or not I'm black enough that was like, 'what you mean?!' That was more of a challenge than being fat." Nana was very thankful for the 1990s while living in Newmarket as she mentioned pop culture celebrities and Spike Lee movies helped create an environment where "Black was cool." "I didn't find it hard to fit in because there were white and then other cultures so I wasn't alone per se. But there were times I was mad my dad was "so African." Nana also discusses the way in which 'Black fat' and 'white fat' are seen differently. Nana's friend, a white woman, has told her, "'black fat' tends to be tighter, with more shape, better looking, while 'white fat' is looser more cellulite and disgusting." Nana spoke about her Black skin's significance within the context of African American popular culture and representation of Black women on screen. Nana says North American cinema doesn't cast dark or very dark-skinned women in roles of resilience because the assumption is that the light or lighter-skinned Black woman is the one who embodies resilience.

> Lighter skin, in the eyes of many who cast, has resilience because she has a little bit more confidence because she's a little bit more uppity because she can take up more space because she's whiter, but not the dark skinned 'ugly' Black girl…fat ugly black girl like Gabourey Sidibe in *Precious* for instance… She's cast in a role about the down and out fat dark-skinned Black girl yeah…

Nana finds cuteness in lighter-skinned women but sees the sexiness and strength in darker-skinned Black women. “The dark-skinned Black woman commands strength and sexiness.”

Pat, 36, says she has felt scrutinized as a Black, fat woman from youth experiences in a variety of spaces, from school to the grocery store. “I’m hyper aware as a Black woman, as an educated Black woman as a very A-type personality how much scrutiny I’m under in my body.” Pat continued to talk about the way in which scrutiny under what she calls the “white gaze” literally causes her to be “clumsy” … a type of anxiety when she experiences racist microaggression such as when she nervously dropped her pocket change when a white woman at Loblaws asserted her whiteness by not giving Pat the time she needed to complete her interaction at the checkout. Pat also spoke about having to adjust to working and being around white people when she left an old place of employment where she was primarily around self-identified women, people of colour and trans people. When responding to microaggression, Pat says she sometimes wants to be loud and that being “controlled” takes more work and gives her more tension.

> I control myself because I’ve been raised to be polite …I guess subconsciously, especially around White people, because you don’t want to be a disgrace to the race… the clumsiness is a part of my anxiety.” “If I had a dollar for every time someone said I was yelling at them… and I don’t yell…

She retells an instance where her email to a white colleague was scrutinized by her boss, a white woman, as being “rude” because she gave him directive. “At a bare minimum that’s a function of being a woman. How race comes into that I think is just, you know…carried. I could

see in the same situation a white woman having the same issue, but my Blackness is all over me." Pat says she feels desiring and entitled to take up space so she is particularly annoyed by people's issues with trying to minimize her space. Pat wonders if she were darker-skinned if she would be called "cute" as she is sometimes. Pat was the lightest in her family and was sometimes teased by her brother about being as light as a paper bag. Currently, Pat is a supervisor at her job and says her body is particularly policed by two Black women subordinates who both often want to give her unsolicited advice on her clothing choices and when her bra strap shows. Pat says the stereotype that suggests all Black women who are larger are accepted is inaccurate. "You have to have a certain look as a Black woman in order to be accepted. "You have to have a small waist and a big butt… now my butt is big but it's also flat."

Lexis, 34, discusses her benefits of being a "well put together" Black woman as opposed to not. Lexis says that she feels a certain sense of freedom that comes from being bigger and Black as opposed to if she was a white fat woman.

> If I think about like moving around as like a sexual person…as a Black woman, um, and about like desire, I do feel like my curves are more acceptable as something to be desired because I'm Black…In some ways it's kind of nice, um, to be a Black woman because I feel like people [laughs] are not expecting me to be that thin in a way... I don't feel as compelled to apologize for my body as a white woman in my position might feel…there is a perception that Black women aren't thin even though there are so many thin Black women...As a Black woman with curves I feel I have more freedom…to just eat.

Lexis also mentions a Black junior high friend she had who was skinny and got no attention from the boys because she was skinny. Her Asian friend who was skinny however got attention.

Lexis is married to her husband and is in an open marriage. Lexis lists herself on her dating profile as a curvy Black woman. Initially she was concerned that she may not get as much attention as when she was younger and thinner but that wasn't the case. "Dating, has brought me to an even better place of self acceptance." Lexis is very specific with who she selects and she says she only goes after people who are "pretty hot." Lexis' attraction has been primarily to white men but she also has had attractions to women, more masculine identified or trans men and she says she would date herself. Lexis dates white men predominantly now and believes "there may be a connection to the amount of rejection I've received in my life, um, from, um, Black men or boys." She also feels like there may be a certain way of "sticking it to white women."

> I do get a little bit of a rush knowing that my body is preferable to somebody who through their own physicality puts them at the like sort of peak, right, of the social structure. I mean, I enjoy getting together with very, very attractive white men who could kind of get anybody that they wanted… It's a little bit of a finger in the face of all the skinny blonde white women. I'm just as hot as you are and your men think so too [laughs].

Lexis experienced bullying because she was gifted, in theatre, and was the "Black girl who didn't speak in slang…I couldn't really do the same kinds of patois." Lexis was teased for "not being Black enough" by many Black kids in elementary school. Lexis was teased

mercilessly by a Black girl in grades one and two. As an adult Lexis reflects on this girl and figured that based on her memories of her childhood bully it looked like she wasn't well kept.

> She didn't have the signs of somebody who's parents took care of her… she didn't seem groomed… just didn't have the look that many conscientious Black parents package their kids…hair grooming, clothing because Black parents are so concerned about how their children are perceived.

Years later in adulthood, Lexis bumped into the same girl, now an adult, at a nightclub. Lexis says that even though the woman tried to initiate friendly banter with Lexis, she ignored her as she still holds the pain from the bullying she experienced from her. Lexis says that mixed race girls with longer hair and lighter brown skin were most desirable in her schools, especially among Black boys. She didn't fit this ideal. In high school, she attended a predominantly white, affluent high school and was seen as "un-datable." Lexis speaks of the "weird duality" where Black boys would often make fun of the Black girls (elementary).

> I had felt very rejected by other black children as a young person…Being more racially ambiguous or lighter… I'd wish for that curly hair…Every other white girl I was friends with was having experiences and it wasn't happening for me…It was painful and very frustrating.

One of Lexis' sisters bleached her skin but according to Lexis it never became a habit as the products she used were not that effective and Lexis could barely see a difference. In terms of

Lexis' own skin and its significance she says, "there's so much that is wrapped up in my skin...My cultural history, my experience, I don't know who I'd be if I just woke up…lighter or white or thin…Like I can't imagine wishing for that because I would be wishing away my whole self….My skin is a filter for like everything I see…the way that I perceive situations and evaluate people…There's very little time or space in my life where I'm not aware of my skin and that's not a bad thing necessarily…I never want to leave my skin…"

Fancy, 31, Fancy says that even her white stepfather has made it clear to her that she is not welcomed in Canada. "The U.S. is over the table…they either hate you or they don't… In Canada, they are under the table…you can have a friend for 20 years and in the 21st year you can learn they are terribly racist. It's really painful to deal with…and it's really isolating."
Fancy discusses how in Canada she is referred to as Black but in Jamaica she was referred to as mixed. They saw her as African. She was "mixed" because she was African and Jamaican. According to Fancy, "the term Black doesn't give way to the complexities and that's what we're talking about, the intersectionalities."

> That's why I prefer to talk about culture than race… I find that culture brings up those you know complexities and intertextuality. Then we can start talking about the complications of gender and culture and the intersections of both of those things… If you just talk about race you're going to get polarities that's it… lots of confusions and lots of tolerance not real conversations on the elephant in the room.

Fancy says there is a “Black glass ceiling in Canada” that has caused her not to see the successes she feels she could be able to reach if there was more representation. “I know I have what it takes to be successful but I often feel that because I don’t see equity in Toronto I always feel misplaced and therefore not enough.” She also speaks explicitly about the poor treatment she’s received for her mental health in that there is no culturally relevant treatment services and no distinctions made between how oppression, violence and histories of trauma impact mental health. “Professionals just see you as crazy instead of seeing all the oppression we are responding to through our bodies and our minds.” Fancy says she feels her depression is a normal response to the atrocities she has experienced in her life. Fancy was hospitalized by her mother in the United States. Fancy says it was extremely traumatic for her as she was partially naked in a van with the people who wrestled her to the hospital.

> I felt so guilty. I felt like if everyone in the world was turning in on me, then I should turn in on myself. And then I also felt that this was so unjust that I would make a mark to make sure that I would be able to tell my story that they would know. So, I decided to bite myself. So, I actually bit myself. And that’s why I wanted to share this point with you because it shows you that regardless of how I felt about how pretty I was or whatever, it didn’t matter because it was – I felt that the external world had more say on my own health management, on who I was and how I was and my own mental sanity.

Fancy speaks extensively on the systemic problems with mental health treatment in Canada and being a Black woman who has survived said treatment. According to Fancy “It doesn’t matter

your background, your class or whatever socio-economic background…Your colour matters and it makes a difference, you know, um, in terms of how you're treated and how you feel, um, comfortable in your world and, specifically in Canada." While mental health is not a subcategory in this chapter, it presents itself when participants speak of the embodied emotional, mental and physical effects they experience in response to body-based traumas.

On Family:

Becky credits her parents for telling her she was beautiful when she was growing up. However, Becky's aunt's comment about her body made Becky initially see herself as fat. "My relatives made comments about me being 'thick' and to be honest that's when I started to realize I was 'bigger.' One aunt referred to me as the 'fat niece.' I wasn't even fat… I didn't feel like I was until my aunt said I was." Becky's mom, as she has become too, is a consummate girdle (body shaper) undergarment wearer. Becky's mom is obsessed with her weight. "My mother has been on a diet for 35 years…For my mom and aunts, 'fat talk' is a form of bonding." Becky says, her two brothers, who she says are not fat, are also hyper-vigilant of their bodies especially if they gain weight in their face. "My brother once rode his bike 4.5hrs from Toronto to Niagara Falls…he was on a health kick because he noticed his body and especially his face getting bigger."

Becky was also outed as queer by her cousin in her mid 20s. This resulted in her having to leave home. According to Becky, she was no longer able to spend her time and financial resources buying the clothes she'd been accustomed to. While she battled numbness, finding a roof was Becky's priority.

> I gained almost 100lbs during that period and my weight was sometimes an issue and other times not. I was so depressed. I didn't feel like the body I had was mine…I looked in the mirror and I didn't see myself. I didn't like who I saw…this wasn't the body I knew all my life, so I just kind of didn't associate myself with it. It was weird. I felt so abandoned, numb and empty. I didn't feel like I had a home. I was on a couch.

For Steff, 29, there were days when her mom reinforced that she was beautiful and other days if they were arguing and saying horrible things to one another, "she would call me a whale." Her mom, who passed away, Steff says, was one of the most "wonderful and intellectual people in her life." For Steff, fat remains a place of vulnerability.

> I've tried my best to forget comments from nanas or aunties about my size or waistline…just those little offhanded comments like 'oh I thought that would have fit you…I mean it fits me'…you know...can completely tear down a person.

Steff shared a memory of meeting her grandmother on her mother's side for the first time. Her mom was adopted and her grandmother hadn't seen her since birth. "My mom's mother took one look at my mother and said, 'you're *so* Black'…I guess she probably thought she should have been lighter-skinned… that was it for my mom. That was the last time we ever saw her."

According to Amina, 39, who identifies as an orphan, both her parents were rotten. Once an aspiring child model, when the modeling agency felt she was too fat, her parents alienated her and disliked her body further. Amina says, her father would show her pictures of white, thin kids in magazines idolizing them.

> My parents were troubled, fucked up, asshole people… they'd say, 'that's what you are supposed to look like…you have to lose weight' and, I was like, I'm a kid...they cook my food, they feed me…I have no control over my food or my environment. Even if I wanted to lose weight…I was just a kid… often being told boys can do this… girls can't do that… and I have to work extra hard there's no room for error...I'm a Black fat girl and I have to work extra hard to achieve. It's perfect or nothing…no room for failure.

Amina says at times she wished she were white.

> I was getting the message that it's wasn't okay to be me and it's better to be light-skinned and it's better to be white and to be white was to be thin… My hair was wrong too…they felt it was ugly…My parents even moved us to Newmarket or Aurora…some white place because they hated themselves so much they didn't want to live where there were other Black people.

Amina says she was an excellent child swimmer.

> As a child in elementary, I had a bright red one-piece swimsuit… I felt like I was a super hero, I used to watch Wonder Woman and all that. My father took a picture with me too happy and proud pushing my stomach out since I just swam an ass load of laps with kids who were teenagers well beyond my age. I was really feeling myself [proud], right. My

> dad shoved the picture in my face and ridiculed me. It didn't matter that I was kicking ass it was just about how I looked.

Amina shares vivid memories of her parents' attempts to best fit in with the White families in their neighbourhood. "We'd get invited to our neighbour's house for dinner and looking back I'm sure they were probably saying to themselves, 'Oh these are exceptional Black people…they speak so well…Let's hang out with the civilized well behaved Black Jamaican people.'"

Nana, 35, was fat and her other two sisters were not. Her parents never compared them. "My sister is tall and skinny, she always was. When we stood together, we made the number ten. She was tall, I was round and we never got compared. I never shared clothes with my sister because my shit was too big and it wasn't an issue." Nana's parents provided financially so she never felt left out or underdressed in comparison to her thin sisters.

> My size was accommodated. I always got more money when we went to get our dresses because mine cost more. Because my sisters and I were never compared at home, I never felt as an adult that I needed to compare myself to others… Our parents raised us to never feel inferior to anyone or ask for anyone's acceptance.

Pat, 36, who has been on many diets, says how she feels about her body has been influenced by her mom. "I've been a fat girl all my life… I contrast that against my mother who was a size one and became fat… She's been in this body that doesn't feel comfortable…" Pat's mom told Pat she wished that she was smaller. Her mom thought things would be less menacing

for her if she was smaller. “My mom always stressed covering up my stomach, not pushing it out, not making it show…pull your top down she’d say.” As an adult Pat says, “Skinny girls, dudes get stretch marks I’m like I don’t give a fuck.”

> So, it’s like really checking myself and saying okay, this is my skin. I value it…My skin is really actually important. I have struggled… Right now, I’m really moving into valuing my skin, valuing my stretch marks. I remember seeing [other] Black women’s stomachs out…I just started doing it. I was like I don’t care, you know?

Lexis, 34, says she resents her mom for never telling her she was beautiful. According to Lexis, she had confidence as a kid but said that certain social situations start to break it down. “My mom would say pretty is as pretty does…my mom didn’t think it was important to tell me I was beautiful. I told her it really was… because there were times as a kid I felt ugly. My mom stressed education and I guess it was kind of cool that mom wasn’t so focused on my looks.” Lexis’ mom always had her presentable and well groomed but without the extra trappings of designer name brands or hair perms. According to Lexis, she was daddy’s little girl. He passed away in 2006. He would always take pictures of her as a child and they would all end up in the photo album.

Lexis states that mom was definitely the less affectionate parent. “Mom was, if anything, all about her son.” Mom was a stay at home mom and dad worked. Dad hung on to his “daddy’s girl” and didn’t give permission for her to shave her legs in grade six. He once told her “You look like a hooker!” Lexis’ parents were not happy with her burlesque performances and were both horrified when she received media coverage for this. Her dad was very upset when she left

home but he also expressed to her that she was a survivor. She left home first of her siblings. “I don’t remember if dad called me pretty… he probably did…But I do know that he always just made me feel that way.” Lexis moved out of her family home at 17 years of age and began sex work at 18 and go-go dancing at 19. “I finally felt like a sexual person…it was really freeing.”

Fancy, 31, says she has a complicated relationship with her parents and she told her mom about her being raped four times and her two accounts of sexual molestation as a child. Her mom didn’t believe her sexual violations. However, Fancy also says her mother was the only person to really help establish her self-worth.

> She made sure I was always dressed really well, that I felt good about myself. But I never saw that validated in the external world because I lived in a Canadian white world, right? Because I’m a Black woman I’m still going to either be hyper-sexualized, stigmatized and ostracized in one way, shape or form… If I had to die and have a gravestone in Canada, I would put on my grave ‘Uncomfortably Canadian’ … I will always be uncomfortably Canadian and I just feel that they have this, um, underlying cultural mosaic to kinda sweep over the fact they’re internally racist.

According to Fancy, her mental health counsellor blamed Fancy for her own rape because she was intoxicated. “I never felt safe with the counsellors…I couldn’t relate to them...” Fancy often says she thought her father, being from Ghana, wanted her to be bigger but he didn’t. She remembers he would put her down even though she tried throughout her life to starve herself and

do weight loss strategies. Fancy moved out of home young and has been seeking father figures in her life. Many, she says, end up just trying to sleep with her.

On Clothing/Fatshion:

"Clothing is number one…it's everything to me," says Becky, 34, who identifies putting herself together as an integral part of her identity.

> I can forget I'm fat when I'm well put together…Before I had to leave home, I had money to dress myself. I looked better than everyone else… When I was outed, I couldn't dress myself. I didn't feel put together. I felt less than sloppy. I felt like a handbag. Now that I can put myself together again I can look just as good or better than someone thin.

Becky has a denim jacket she often wears at work to cover her arms and tummy area she says. She feels uncomfortable and hyper-visible due to her office's constant fat talk, body policing and shaming.

> They are always talking about what they eat and who's wearing what or who…who looks good who doesn't, so looking polished I think gives me a leg up. At least when they look at me they don't necessarily see the fat…they see nice clothes…they see fashion and style…they don't see the fat Black girl. My denim jacket is very stylish... its like a security blanket but I'm disappointed I've had to wear it so much recently.

In some instances, Becky will wear mini skirts, which she deems as more risqué. “Sometimes I just ignore the fatness and silly fashion rules and I just try to embrace myself instead of living up to some ridiculous ideal.” Becky also used to “overspend tons of money on shoes and accessories” because she says plus options aren’t always unique and if you want to stand out your accessories are sometimes your only way. However, this is no longer financially viable for her. “My nice shoes and nice necklace may not *not* necessarily make you see the fat, but at least you will see me,” she explains.

In seven or eighth grade Steff, 29, shared a memory of creating her will in her journal. “I ranted about likely not being able to hand down my clothes to my girlfriends because they were all smalls and extra-smalls and my clothes were extra-larges.” Steff started sewing at the age of 12 out of necessity. “I was either altering clothes so I could still look like my peers or simply so my clothes would fit as I wanted them to…A lot of my being [resilient] was created out of necessity.” Steff believes fashion should not be segregated based on size. She says things like ‘fatshion’ further stigmatize fat women’s bodies. “It’s important to empower women through fashion at any size. I don’t know that the best way to reclaim body individuality is through this whole fatshion movement. Why can’t fashion just be fashion?” Steff says, the big problem with plus fashion is that designers don’t put time into dressing large bodies. “It’s not as simple as [adding] more fabric…It’s about the right cut, the right fit, age and body-appropriate and modern…We don’t all want to hide in drapes of fabric…form fitting actually looks better putting myself together.” She also feels tokenistic or abrupt inclusion of fatness in fashion isn’t effective either in changing the status quo and suggests we “more gradually buck the system.” Steff says, “having a fat Barbie with rolls, grey hair and wrinkles…putting a size 26 woman on a mainstream fashion runway…isn’t going to make high end designers take us seriously

overnight...it becomes farcical." She did, however, speak to the benefit to her self-esteem of seeing other women who look like her online through blogging, magazines, online campaigns. "I think they help me…give me an affirmation to my voice and my righteousness as a model and as a plus size woman."

Amina, 39, remembers loving to dress up – sometimes "girly" and sometimes "tomboy." Amina remembers the clothing of the 70s as very colourful, very vivid. She had this bright yellow velour outfit comprised of a tank top and matching shorts. She didn't think it was wrong to be fat or chubby. "I just saw it as me getting big and strong like my dad or something…I didn't think having a big tummy was bad… I used to push it out because the super heroes used to push out their stomachs or their chests…that's where their power came from." Amina reflected on her mom's dressing and how she had to present herself to keep her job wearing stockings in the hot sun and painful stilettos. Amina, who has really big feet, spoke at length about what a "polished Amina" looks like and what the significance of being "well put together" is for her as a fat woman. However, she also reflects on the way in which her financial barriers make it difficult for her to do all of these "processes," as she calls them, to be well polished. "When or if I don't feel not great in my body it's usually about my clothing. Not having something flattering is a significant thing. It's easier to feel good in your body if you like your clothes." Amina explains that money is often an issue for her.

> When you're poor it takes considerable time and energy to find a deal… I also don't shop online because of shipping fees and let's be real, the best way to pass in fatphobic spaces is to be well put together, groomed and all that kind of stuff…hair proper…clothes

> proper…And when you're dressed proper, you might be broke, but you look polished and smooth you can pass in places.

Nana, 35, had to wear a uniform in high school and didn't like it. "I never wanted to have to look the same … I've never been by the book. I can read the book and I can even make you think I'm in it, but I'm not going by it. That's another reason why I'm awesome at bookkeeping and accounting because the point is to find the loophole." Nana says she refuses to hide in her clothes. She refuses to "frumpalize" herself as she calls it by hiding away in black, grey, and brown clothing.

> I will wait for the sales at Penningtons and Addition Elle for the colour and the cute stuff. Because here in Toronto no one wants colour. They want to fucking frumpalize themselves in dark colours that don't even fit or suit your body type where I'm just like are you kidding me?! I like the hot pink and the bright yellow. I want the colour, I want the whites, I want all that stuff yeah…

Nana expresses that her outer appearance impacts how others perceive her.

> How do you expect someone to have a nicer view of you if you are too afraid to try and give your visual appearance a fighting chance and I'm not saying for anybody, fuck everybody, but for yourself? Pride is in how you show it…I often shop in the UK… European style is ahead of ours so my clothes stay 'in style' longer.

Nana also credits online plus size blogging with a shift in the types of clothes made available for women.

> You see plus size bloggers online fucking rocking it with different types of shapes of bodies and online shopping you can see how something might look on you…Designers are taking notice and realizing these bodies are actually what most of the population looks like and therefore will help fuel their success… Fat's only negative for the person who wants it to be negative...We're in Toronto [so] you can find something to wear and if not here, New York is not that far away.

For Pat, 36, clothing and her accessories are a significant part of how she "presents" herself. She shops predominantly at thrift stores or in the U.S. and doesn't shop online because she needs to feel and try on her clothing first. As a youth, Pat says she had 150 pairs of earrings and approximately 40 pairs of shoes. Accessories became a place to show her personality since she had difficulty finding clothes that fit and often had to shop in men's departments for sizes. "Finding something at a cool store like Le Chateau was the most exciting thing in the world." Pat also says that the baggier 'urban' style of the 90s allowed her to camouflage her size when necessary. She is very mindful of being well put together in the workplace and although she often receives compliments, she wonders if these are more so amazement that she is able to be stylish as a fat woman.

> When I go to work, I dress to impress. I put myself together. If I'm going to work I need to be good in my head and I need to be dressed in a particular way… Then I was dressing

> in all Black everything…now taking pride in how I present myself allows me to move through the world in a way that I can take ownership and make decisions…

Pat says she has shifted her dressing in order to address the desexualisation of her body. "I don't wear pants anymore…I purchase items that are overly feminine and that accentuate certain body parts…and I've moved away from wearing predominantly Black or blue outfits that made me more invisible." Pat wore a "sexy white top" to a nightclub that she says, "magically made her stomach look flat." "I felt light, carefree, a certain amount of courage in that…a removal of control in a particular way…I had an amazing energy and even danced with a guy which I rarely do…I felt desirability that night." Pat says she loves thongs and now invests in not only thongs but expensive bras that fit well.

As a teenager, Lexis, 34, says, "I would wear anything as long as it was wackadoodle…[laughs]" According to Lexis, as she progressed through high school her clothing reflected the freedom of not being around her Black friends from elementary who expected her to dress more urban. Instead, she began to wear more punk, black concert t-shirts and tight Black jeans. Lexis says there are benefits to looking a certain way. At other times, she says not dressing up has its advantages.

> I do feel um, more, less visible and less feminine when I operate in a more functional way…Especially as a Black woman if you're well dressed that allows people to feel more comfortable around you since you are not one of those trashy Black women. If they can pick out signifiers that make you more comfortable… Nice shoes, nice purse you know… well dressed makes people more comfortable around you.

Lexis is frustrated with limited clothing options for her body shape. Lexis studied fashion so she creates her own designs. “I want my clothes to emphasize my curvy figure… plus designers don’t want to emphasize our shapes…People try to dress bigger bodies in a sack.

Fancy, 31, recounts stories of having to “dress to impress” or to fit-in in order to meet her parent’s expectations. She shares a story of how angry her dad was that she did not wear “t-shirt and jeans” to his university lecture. He was angry that she wore a linen dress. Fancy’s dad felt that everyone typically wore the “North American outfit” of t-shirt and jeans and he was embarrassed that Fancy didn’t abide by that expectation. She has a similar story with her mother. Fancy says her clothing choices are really about her feeling safer and, in her opinion, less perpetually hyper-sexualized as a Black woman. “I tend to isolate myself from social settings where I feel I’m being judged if I don’t abide by whatever fashion suggests that I need to wear to be ‘sexy.’” Fancy feels like because she dresses more conservatively and because she has limited income and has lost many of her clothing options based on her weight gain, she is “un-datable in white Canada”: “Because I’m covered more it appears I’m not dateable…Because I’m not seen as that Black, kinky woman that you see in the music videos.” Fancy discussed how her dress practices are reflective of her previous experiences with trauma.

> You have to understand I’ve been sexually assaulted four times in my life plus had two counts of molestation earlier on… I have a nice ass but I don’t need to show that to the world. You know what I mean? When you go through that, you go through certain stages where you feel that you have a right to protect yourself. That you have some sort of

accountability. So, over time, I tend to dress more – just I cover – cover my assets up a little bit more than the average person. Because I don't want that attention.

In conclusion, my seven participants' body stories and reflections are documented in this chapter. Participant comments on [their] fat/ness, Black/ness, their relationships with significant and generalized others, such as family and intimate partners, and their relationships with objects, such as their clothing, emphasize the network of moments, memories, social interactions and social forces which inform how they feel about and perceive their bodies and how they feel perceived by others. These 'threads that bind' my participants together through both their body story similarities and differences will be taken up more deeply in the next chapter. No two women's body stories are congruent.

The next two chapters of the dissertation are focussed on the discussion. Chapter 5 Social Interactions & Social Forces are explored through two themes. The first section of the chapter explores Social Interactions with Significant Others: Living & Learning While Fat, Black and a Woman and the second section of Chapter 5 explores Social Forces as Generalized Others: Weighing in on Trauma. I offer observations on the threads that bind and also those that unravel, and I explore the ways in which the participants' individual stories have larger resonance for my research. Chapter 5 begins by revisiting the dissertation's purpose and key objectives, and then I focus my discussion on the ways in which the women's body stories reveal important themes and experiences connected to Black and fat embodiment. Participants' body stories reveal frequently voiced awareness of the significance of family history, and the importance of social interactions with significant and generalized others in schooling, workplace and community/activism spaces and the social forces that influence these interactions. These social relations are sometimes

narrated as violent, messy, difficult or pleasurable encounters, and sometimes reacted to, as Chapter 6 explores, with participants' conscious dress and self-fashioning choices as a form of "aesthetic management" (Cash, 1990) and as both situated and embodied practice (Entwistle, 2000, 2015).

As Chapter 6 documents, participants' 'buckin' the system' – practices of resistance, re-imaging and self definition through for instance sartorial and accessory choices provide insight about both their engagement and disengagement with normalized body ideals and their ways of navigating these through both accommodative and resistive means of (ad)dressing their identity. The three general interview probes[53] mentioned earlier help to inform the themes or *the threads that bind* that are unearthed through my participants' body stories. The discussion that follows in the next two chapters establishes the importance of social interactions, social forces (i.e. trauma), self-definition and self-valuation through resistance and resilience and the significance of my participants' sartorial choices to their body stories. These prove to be significant to how my participants negotiate their identities as they navigate through difficult and often oppressive environments.

[53] The purpose of these three general interview probes was to help participants situate and contextualize their experiences and thoughts about their bodies as they discuss them with me in the interview. These three general probes as areas of exploration help to focus participant narratives and reflections on their 1) life histories, 2) contemporary experiences, social interactions and objects of significance in regards to the research topic as Black women who self-identify as fat or other euphemisms for fat, and their 3) reflections on and meaning making of these experiences and their influence on how the participants (ad)dress their identity and any subsequent interactions.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL INTERACTIONS & SOCIAL FORCES

> "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."
>
> – W.E.B. Dubois (1868-1963) on the sensation of Double Consciousness for Black People.

This study provides insight as to how a small group of women negotiate, make sense of, and construct their body aesthetic against and in relation to dominant normalized ideals living within systems that routinely stratify fat and Black embodiment. There is a paucity of research on fat Black women's embodiment in Canada and this study on Toronto-based participants addresses this. Fatness and blackness are often pathologized as 'different,' undesirable states of being. Difference, as fat and black embodiment are often perceived, is always relational and value-laden therefore difference is arguably not only constructed as different but it is thought of as different from a 'centre' – a lesser state (Ducille, 1996). The stories of my participants prove that Black women do have stories to tell about their body acceptance journeys and, as participants noted, readings of their bodies – particularly their perceived fatness and blackness cannot be separated from their everyday social interactions, respectability politics, performances of self and life negotiations (Shaw, 2005, 2006, 2012; Tate, 2007; 2012; 2015; 2017; 2018).

In cultural sociologist Shirley Anne Tate's *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics* (2009), she describes Black beauty as a performative, complex negotiation of ongoing identity reconstructions that consistently grapple with normalized beauty ideals informed by Eurocentric beauty standards. Black beauty is also capable of performing differently and disrupting beauty normalizations. In Tate's *The Governmentality of Black Beauty Shame: Discourse, Iconicity and Resistance* (2018), she argues for a Black decolonial feminist approach to Black beauty shame – one that foregrounds our experiences and/or the role of racism and racialization in the social determination of whether or not Black bodies are looked upon as beautiful or ugly. According to Tate, "Labels of beauty and ugly have consequences on our lives they are not neutral judgements... Beauty and ugly impact all our psyches, our affective lives, our possibilities of being and extend to and through society, culture and political economy. Beauty and ugliness are socio-culturally constructed and as such are raced, gendered, sexualized, classed, abled and aged in a multitude of ways" (1-3) and as my participants attest, they are also *sized*. My participants' body stories illuminate their active identity negotiations and through a close reading of their stories I relate W.E.B Dubois' concept of double consciousness.

In Dubois' seminal text *The Soul of Black Folk* (1903) he describes double-consciousness as an awareness of the two-ness of being American and African American and the largely unconscious, almost instinctive movement between these two identities (Dubois, 1903). Originally written over a century ago, and within a Black American context, it remains an undeniably accurate reading of many situations I have personally experienced. It also can be used to theorize the varying experiences of all my participants who, whether they believe or know they are resisting, accommodating, or 'bucking' the system, are actively engaged with a strategic weighing of corporeal behaviour, appearance, body language, vocal cadence and in

some cases even the ideologies believed in order to not only survive but thrive day to day. I propose the concept of 'triple consciousness' to describe the interlocking and intersecting raced, gendered, and sized bodily expectations Black fat women must strategize through – namely fat phobia or sizeism, racism, sexism and the tensions and anxieties that arise from having to be "put together" in not only their wardrobe choices but their performances of race, heteronormative gender and size in order to fit in or rebelliously fit out. In a recent Global News media interview on discrimination (Vella, 2018), I referred to the trio of anti-fat, anti-black and anti-woman rhetoric as a "trifecta of hate."

My seven participants range in age from 29 to 39 years of age. Becky, Lexis, Steff, Amina and Pat were born in Toronto while Nana and Fancy were born in Ghana and Nigeria respectively. Nana has lived in Toronto since childhood and Fancy since young adulthood. One participant, Steff, identified as mixed-race Black & Caucasian with mixed ethnic backgrounds while the other participants identified as second-generation Canadians born of immigrant parents hailing from Caribbean islands or countries in the African continent. Most participants identified with the term "Black" as both a personal and political term for identifying themselves. Others identified as, "African-Canadian," "African" or African and Caribbean. Race as a social construct (Hall, 2002) [54] is further understood since some participants, namely Fancy, discussed what she sees as the limitations of the word Black as an identifier since it has varying meanings according to its context and the 'looker.' Fancy shares when she was in Jamaica on a vacation it

[54] Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall argued that although the signifiers of race are most often found on the body, there is nothing in the body – biologically – that gives those signifiers meaning. Race, as a social construct, and the meanings attached to embodied signifiers of racial identity significantly shift based on the time, space and place in which they are being interpreted. Racial signifiers, and the makings of 'race' – namely Blackness – as otherness gains power through the circulation and adoption of various social discourses. The social construction of race as difference and subjugated, though based on intangibility, ironically has very tangible effects for Black and other racialized persons. As my participant stories suggest, readings of their bodies are directly linked to and with stereotypical, 'raced' readings of their Blackness.

was the first time she was ever called "mixed." In conversation with a Jamaican local, Fancy identified herself as Jamaican but, as she didn't speak with a notable Jamaican accent, the individual continued to ask where she was born. Fancy said she was born in Nigeria. The individual smiled and said according to Fancy, "you see, you are not Jamaican you are mixed – African and Jamaican." Fancy used this example to express the complexity of race – ""Black" in Canada but "mixed" in Jamaica," she explained.

Similar to debates raised in scholarship on the heterogeneity of Blackness within Canada (Wane & Deliovsky et. al., 2002; Walcott, 2003), Fancy's anecdote details the limitations of the label "Black" in terms of its geographic boundaries in this case. These variations, as the variations in their body stories suggest, impact how participants experience their embodiment. Furthermore, for those who have migrated to Toronto, their body stories offered additional insight on previous literature investigating how migrants negotiate identity and their body image through processes of acculturation and their resistance of or desire to assimilate to the body ideals outside of their previous home locations (Nasser & Katzman et al., 2001; Piran & Levine et al., 1999; Poran, 2002, 2006). Fancy's father, a professor and politician, migrated to America from Nigeria and also taught occasionally in Canada. According to Fancy, when she'd visit him at his university the expectation was that she'd wear a "North American" outfit which he identified as a tee-shirt and jeans so she'd fit in with the rest of his students. When she didn't adhere to these expectations, her father was frustrated.

> I am not seen as an individual with them [parents]. No, I'm my parents, their reflection. When I'm around him I could barely breath…instead of the right outfit, I wore a linen dress, converse sneakers and a hat. My dad was paranoid and I've always felt he has his

own issues with posttraumatic stress from being a political refugee and so he is always trying to fit in at any cost.

In Miller and Woodward's work on jeans (2012) – an ethnography of wearing blue jeans in North London – Goffman's work on stigma was used to explore how jeans were a means through which people who did not want to be marked as 'different' were able to pass as 'ordinary.' Wearing blue jeans was a means through which migrants managed to avoid a stigmatized identity (Tseëlon, 2016: 161).

Participants provide powerful reflections on the significance of their skin as they live, love, learn, work, date, seek belonging, negotiate sexuality, mitigate conflict, negotiate relationships and engage in daily social interactions while living as fat and Black women. In this first discussion chapter, I use thematic analysis to consider the deeper implications of the participants' body stories in relation to one another's narratives (Reissman, 2008: 74). This Chapter 5 offers an exploration of the first significant theme Significant & Generalized Others: Social Interactions & Social Forces and is explored through two sub-themes: Social Interactions with Significant Others: Living & Learning While Fat, Black and a Woman; and, Social Forces as Generalized Others: Weighing in on Trauma. In the next chapter, chapter six, I explore the ways that participants make impassioned claims to the significance of their skin and their personal and communal ways of resistance, self-valuation and self-definition – reimagining themselves outside of interlocking oppressions – 'buckin' the system' through sartorial choices.

According to participants, significant and generalized others, social interactions and social forces impact how others, past and present, see and interact with them. For instance, Pat, who identified as heterosexual, shared the impact of the bullying she'd experienced in high

school at 19 years of age and its impact in her adulthood. Pat, who was body and fat-shamed by adolescent boys in high school, especially Black boys, recalled the influence this has in her adult anxieties around dating men.

> I was the student council president and um played on the football team…and there was one guy in particular but he had henchmen if that's the right term. So, I had to walk by these guys everyday to get to the student council office, and it was just like, "you're so fat" …I don't remember all their insults but I remember it in my body and to this day I'm generally awkward about my body and yeah, all the childhood bullying is seminal in terms of how I interact with men in intimate ways.

The impact of Pat's childhood bullying was so significant that she says she has shared it with intimate Black boyfriends to ensure they know how deeply affected she's been by fat body-shaming and in hopes that she will not have to experience it with them. According to Poran (2006) and Kelch-Oliver and Ancis' (2011) studies, Black men[55] were identified by participants as "standard enforcers" from whom they judged their own beauty in terms of size and who were sometimes an additional place of body judgment and/or shaming. However, the studies mentioned centered the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students from predominantly White universities and this was not the target of my study. The studies were also heteronormative which does not address the realities of five of my seven participants who identified on the spectrum of queerness. What does resonate between these studies and mine is that being "Black"

[55]It is necessary to be observant of any opportunities where data can be used to generalize entire populations. By stating "Black men" as a totality, this is an example of such. While it may not be the intention of the author, when analyzing data, it is necessary to recognize the risk and potential impact of generalizations.

doesn't prevent body dissatisfaction, thinness cannot be assumed as the universal standard for all women and identifying as a Black boy or man does not absolve the ability to body shame regarding fatness, skin tone or any other phenotypical feature such as hair texture which Lexis reflected on when she spoke of the Black boys in her high school who would routinely ignore her as a potential love interest since she was a Black girl with hair that didn't "blow in the wind."

This discussion chapter focuses on the *threads that bind*[56] which have emerged and re-emerged saliently through these interviews. Similar though somewhat different from Charles Horton Cooley's concept of the 'Looking Glass Self,' which suggests people take on perceptions of themselves based on other peoples' perceptions of them (Shilling 2012), my participants' experiences are the threads that 'bind' them; they are *embodied lessons*. Participants stories do suggest that their historical experiences have contemporary significance to their embodiment today. I theorize embodied lessons as key messages participants pick up or internalize unbeknownst to the significant others around them in their social environment. These lessons are not necessarily communicated to the receiver verbally or directly but may occur through non-verbal indirect body language or through ongoing observations over time of repeated behaviours witnessed in the same space (i.e. home, workplace, school) by my participants. Pat shared that she never told her mother about the body-based discrimination she experienced at school. In fact, many of Pat's body anxieties including her concerns about her childhood and current stomach fatness and accompanying worries about it and her perception of its disproportion to the rest of

[56] I use the phrase "threads that bind" to describe social interactions that are significant to our becoming processes. These threads are the key messages, instructions and warnings, spoken and unspoken, we receive from family, schools, our workplaces, our intimate and platonic relationships, our interactions in the fashion and clothing marketplace and the economies as Black fat women. Socializing 'threads' in many cases 'bind' us not necessarily together - although they can – but they can also bind us in the sense of helping us to 'keep things together, as we navigate against discrimination as best we can with an air of resistance or resilience. 'Binding' threads also imply that at times our "threads" are also hindering and can bound our growth as evidenced by some of my participants body stories.

her body, are connected with the embodied lessons she's carried with her from childhood learned particularly from her mother.

> I consistently remember watching my mom in the mirror observing her own body she was skinny and then got fat so and I would quietly watch you know… I actually wrote a play - I did a residency with d'bi Young as an adult about how I felt about my body. Hmm I didn't tell anybody about what I experienced at school. She came to see the show and she was like "why didn't you tell me." The reason I didn't tell her is because of my – my mother's own shame around her body, right? I didn't ha – I wasn't conscious about that then, but after we had that conversation and doing work, I understood that was the reason why. Yeah body memory.

Pat's experience reflected several of my participants who spoke of their interpersonal relationships with family members, especially witnessing their own mothers' bodily dissatisfaction or the tyranny of technologies of self they had to participate in to achieve a certain look and how these impacted their own body esteem. The connection between family member's own body esteem and Black women's own body feelings has been documented as has the impact of Black men on Black women's body image (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014). According to Capodilupo and Kim considerable quantitative research has suggested a sort of 'ethnic immunity' where African-American girls and women are thought to express less pressure to meet certain body ideals of thinness and Black boys and men are assumed to prefer bigger body sizes (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Duke, 2000; Gentles & Harrison, 2006). However qualitative studies complicate these findings by illustrating family and Black men, in terms of intimate

partnerships, as “significant, confusing, and frustrating factors to Black women’s body image development” (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014: 39). For instance, some studies showed parents strengthening their children’s connection with their Black, Africentric cultural ideals, while still straightening their children’s hair or encouraging them to conform to other White beauty standards (Rubin et al., 2003). I theorize, through the stories of my participants, that in cases such as Amina and Pat’s where their mothers particularly vocalized with worry about the assumed perils they would face as both Black and fat girls [and later women], this had little to do with their parents desire for them to embrace whiteness and more so a parent’s nervousness about their children’s ability to navigate anti-blackness and the often feminized pathologizing of fatness as observed in dominant obesity discourse for example. And these parents I’d argue may have had reason to worry since fat bodies let alone raced fat bodies have been implicated through obesity and racist discourse as bodies *outside* the boundaries of ‘true’ Canadian citizenship (McPhail, 2017). As Deborah McPhail explores in *Contours of a Nation: Making Obesity and Imagining Canada, 1945-1970* (2017), obesity was not only constructed as a medical disease in need of repair, it was also used to operationalize and perpetuate settler colonialism. According to McPhail, viewed as modern Canadians because of their weight, Indigenous Peoples histories as Canada’s first inhabitants was further erased and their ownership claims to northern lands disregarded.

Participants’ embodied experiences within the above themes are analyzed applying concepts and theoretical ideas relevant to the intersecting frameworks, already established concepts and ones I develop which further the discussion of this study. I envision my participants’ body stories as both sights and sites of crucial interdisciplinary knowledge which

can help further 'thicken'[57] (Friedman & Rinaldi et al., Forthcoming) in this case, strengthen and queer more critically informed applications of fat studies scholarship, Black, anti-racist feminisms, social constructionism, and sartorial theory in relation to Black fat women's intersectional body stories while also demonstrating the *indisciplinarity* of their bodies. As participants relate their body stories, the nuanced similarities and differences within the chorus of their voices and experiences can emerge. As recounted in chapter four, the participants' body stories, situated primarily within their social interactions with individuals, communities and institutions of importance and influence in their lives, the social forces that help to construct and inform those interactions and their articulations of resistance, resilience and accommodation through their self valuation and defining strategies such as demonstrated through their clothing including undergarments, prove the relevance of their body's social and material currency in their everyday lives as they've experienced and recounted moments in their Black girlhood and womanhood in bodies often looked upon as deviant. I consider the implications of this currency in this chapter.

Social Interactions with Significant Others: Living & Learning While Fat, Black and a Woman

[57] The concept 'thicken' generated from the Through Thick and Thin research and community collective project's co-investigator Dr. May Friedman and principal-investigator Dr. Jen Rinaldi. I am also a co-investigator. I was initially invited to the team to 'thicken' the intersectionality theory section of the project proposal within the theoretical framework and methodologies sections. My involvement further involved co-facilitating a participant workshop and the creation phase of the project. I am on hiatus from the project pending the completion of my dissertation. "Through Thick and Thin: Investigating Body Image and Body Management among Queer Women in Southern Ontario" was funded by Women's Health Xchange (2014-15). The concept of 'thick' related to body size is not new. Within Black cultural vernacular 'thick' is often used to describe a person who is, 'not fat or skinny but both mixed together' (Burk, 2013: 9). Being 'thick' also indicates that one is eating, is healthy and has an attractive body shape (Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Kirsten Bell et al., 2010).

Through the interview process, many participants shared body stories like this one, body stories that exceed simple analysis or experience. In Steff's interview, she theorizes about the paradoxes between the social expectations of fat bodies and the material realities of fat bodies:

> Fat is never androgynous it is never misperceived. It never slips away. If anything, it still will rear its head in the place of a back-handed compliment, which is, "oh wow, you're pretty for a fat girl, or you're really intelligent for a fat girl, or there's something different about you." It's actually in the fact that, "oh, I can't believe that this fat girl could actually be sexy or intelligent or opinionated or well read or well spoken, or you know incredibly confident." …Something as baseline as what my body is composed of or what my body has a little more of than other bodies will still run into the way that people handle me, perceive me or dismiss me at times, or *try* [emphasized] to dismiss me, right?" "…It's like the word fat has come to describe somebody who should be less than everybody else. And it's funny because you're essentially telling them that they're, they take up more mass, right? But in calling them that [fat] you're telling them that they're less than, right? More but still less…

At times participant body stories demonstrate how both their intersecting fatness and blackness have been read during specific moments through their girlhood and womanhood. In other circumstances participants have mentioned fatness being more salient than their Blackness or mixed-race identities. Furthermore, their body stories were also constructed in concert with other important variables in their lives. They have learned about fat and Black embodiment and framed and reframed their own identities through interactions with significant and generalized others (Mead, 1934) in their lives and ideologically speaking. Significant others, which is the focus of

this section, includes our primary group of socialization such as family but it can also extend to people who are significant to identity construction such as close friends, educators and school peers, intimate partners and colleagues. Significant others can be persons we may never meet but deeply respect and aspire towards as a role model such as a celebrity or someone we were significantly hurt by, who we may never see again, but their opinion or memory of their interaction with us never leaves our emotional or body memory. After I discuss significant others, I move to 'social forces' which will be discussed through the concept of generalized others. Understood more literally, generalized others, may include strangers or persons with whom we may have less 'significant' contact with [though the contact may be in fact tremendously 'significant'] but more importantly generalized others, similar to reference groups (Shibutani, 1955), represent the shared communal perspective and expectations on social order – the 'bigger than us' ideologies we might tap into which influence for instance what or *who* we judge as wrong or right. Both significant and generalized others impact the role we take in our interactions with others. They represent our memory bank. Participants, through these interactions, collect 'learned' lasting embodied lessons or what I've referred to as 'societal curriculum' (Cortes, 1979; 2000) regarding fatness and/or blackness.

In the interview excerpt that opened this section above, Steff speaks to the salience of the social construction of fatness. Fatness, is seen as "more but still less" and by framing fat as a problem in need of radically dehumanizing solutions or utilizing the blame frame which holds fat people and their 'poor choices' accountable for their 'excessiveness' (Saguy, 2013), Steff's account sheds light on the pervasive anti-fat curriculum most of my participants recounted in their everyday lives through their social interactions. Societal curriculum includes the massive ongoing informal curriculum of families, peer groups, schools, institutions, media, intimate

partners and other socializing forces that educate us throughout our lives and transmit hegemonic and counter-scripts on acceptable bodyhood. Through our interactions with significant others, scripts are repeatedly re-enacted – done and undone, made and remade and as my participants have indicated, they have received very direct 'instruction' on the societal deficiency of fatness which does impact their journeys of 'being and becoming.'[58]

There is no shortage of damaging meanings and assumptions attached to the fat body as an undesirable body of excess and these stereotypes are evident in participant body stories, especially those where parents were unhappy with theirs or their own daughters' bodies. Some of the most naturalized of these 'controlling images'[59] of fatness identify fat bodies, and as such fat people, as slothful, lazy, weak-willed, unreliable, unclean, unhealthy, deviant and defiant (Murray, 2010), and even anti-faith/religion and sexually immoral (LeBesco, 2004; Isherwood, 2007). As Braziel and LeBesco explain, "fat is seen as repulsive, funny, ugly, unclean, obscene, and above all something to lose" (2001:2). These socially constructed 'knowledges' function pandemically to create and reinforce readings of fat bodies as morally bankrupt, abject bodies in need of physical, medical, and social intervention. Positive- reinforced interventions include adhering to "fat-burning" compulsive exercise and regimented diet self-help guru weight-loss guides (Elkaim, 2015; Silva, 2016), surgical removal of fat (WLSs)[60] despite potential

[58] Anthropologist Lanita Jacobs-Huey (2007) explores Black women's hair as a window into African American women's gender and ethnic identities and specifically considers Black hair as a linguistic and cultural engagement with these identities. According to Jacobs-Huey this presents an opportunity for learning thus offering insight into the discursive and corporeal being and becoming of African-American women. For Jacobs-Huey she describes being and becoming as referring to, "Black women's self-perceptions as individuals and members of a collective (being), as well as their transition into different dispositions, ideological stances (or positions), professional statues, and phases of life (becoming)" (5). Instead of hair, I consider Black women's fat/ness and their being/becoming.
[59] Controlling images is a phrase coined by Patricia Hill Collins (2009). I've discussed this elsewhere. However here, I am suggesting that, similar to the controlling images Collins lays out and their influence on Black women's lives so too do controlling images of fatness help to frame how fatness is constructed socially which therefore has a direct impact on how fat Black women and girls are treated as well as how they self-perceive their bodies.
[60] Weight Loss Surgeries

consequences such as long-term health complications or death (Bacon, 2010; Bacon & Aphramour, 2011; 2014), and everyday and systemic size and appearance-based discrimination and harassment experienced through social interactions, practices and policies within employment (Haywood, 2017; Kirkland, 2008), law (Ansari, 2014; Bogart, 2013; Solovay, 2000) and in schools (Larkin & Rice, 2005) to name a few. The desired goal is to eliminate fat/ness and at the very least cement fat and beauty or fat and health as mutually exclusive embodiments.

Participant body stories demonstrate the instability of the concept of fat/ness and shed light on the way in which ideological constructions around fat/ness are learned, function discursively through social interactions and therefore may be unlearned or at least challenged. For example, Becky describes her experience this way:

> As a kid I always felt like people were looking at me, and then I got older and I didn't really care. I thought they were looking at me because I looked good. Now I question if they're looking at me because I look good, or because I'm fat or because I look good *and* [emphasized] I'm fat. As a kid I lived in a home where my mother was always on a diet and my relatives used fat talk as a way of bonding. Sometimes my relatives, like this one aunt would make comments about me being so thick. Now that I think about it I had an aunt who would always call me the "fat niece" when I wasn't. That's when I honestly began to see myself as bigger as fat."

Becky is labeled fat by one aunt and through that interaction she learns not of her difference but of her belonging to a shared experience, as many of her aunts were also fat and many were engaged in ongoing weight loss strategies. How participants understand and explain their experience of fat/ness sheds light on how fatness operates, gets constructed, circulates and is

additionally imbued with intersecting subjectivities such as participants' race, gender, class and sexuality for example. Fatness is also not static. Family socialization, the way fat is framed as positive or negative states of being, and the reception of their fat bodies in public spaces are discussed in participant body stories. Key messages, embodied lessons, received from parents about fat and its proximity to beauty have incomparable weight on participant's current feelings about their bodies.

Some participants engage in a process I refer to as fat "reacceptance" where they report having to "reaccept" their fatness throughout different life stages as they get fatter or as the fat redistributes throughout their body to areas such as their hips and stomach[61] as they age. For Becky, her changing fatness as she got older meant she had to pay additional attention to her aesthetic presentation. "Now that I'm older and fatter, I um I want the world to see me like I'm polished. My nails and toes might not be always done but I want to, I just, I want the world to see me as polished. This helps me look my best as a fat woman. I'm fat, I'm more. Before I was like a little fat, but no, now I'm actually fat but I'm not fat fat." Becky reflected on the significance of weight to her mother who she said had been on a diet for decades and who wore girdles extensively to "mold her fat well" as Becky mentioned. The desire to mold fat "well", as Becky described it, is a desire to perform fat well or *right*. In Cat Pausé's *Rebel Heart: Performing Fatness Wrong Online* (2015), Pausé discusses fat activist individuals and online spaces where there is an active engagement in anti-assimilationism. In other words, people who are directly

[61] Research indicates that women are particularly dissatisfied with the appearance of their abdomens and hips (Cash & Henry, 1995; Garner, 1997), and with the fit of lower body garments (LaBat & DeLong, 1990). This resonates with my participants body stories such as Steff, Becky and Amina who spoke of their 'growing stomachs' and 'muffin tops' which is an expression for fat rolls 'overflowing over' the top of pants or a skirt for instance. Furthermore, this obsession with trying to tame women's fat bellys dates back centuries and culminated in the whalebone corset of the Victorian era. This evolved to the 'stays' and 'girdles' in the mid century and more contemporarily it manifests through the regime of crunches and abdominal exercises we are expected to perform as part of 'good womanhood' (Richardson, 2010: 82).

challenging neoliberal "obesity" discourse and are not subscribing to doing fat "right" but are instead challenging anti-fat messaging and representation through their wrongness. For fat activists and feminists such as Fat Heffalump – the blogger behind Living with Fattitude, exposing her fat rolls unmolded, declaring to "f*ck flattering"[62] and not 'tame' fat is an example of doing fat wrong. However, I would argue, as the stories of my Black women expose, "molding" their fat in a variety of ways – girdles and otherwise – is inextricably linked to their attempts to "mold" their Blackness. This is not a consideration for fat White women who are not dually riddled with the impact of racism. White fat activists' ability to take more chances with fat representation must be understood against the socio-cultural backdrop of inequitable race, gender and class subjectivities which afford certain levels of privilege to them in order to "f*ck flattering" in the first place. "Coming out"[63] as fat (Murray, 2010; Pausé, 2012; Saguy & Ward, 2011) has different costs for different bodies. As Samantha Murray argues in *(Un/Be) Coming Out? Rethinking Fat Politics* (2005), coming out as fat isn't a 'magic pill' to social acceptance as much as it is the embodiment of the liberationist, humanist subjectivity model, as she refers to it, which is central to the fat acceptance movement. Murray questions the idea that 'coming out' as fat alone can transform and re-inscribe the societal loathing of fatness. This is an extensive amount of responsibility to place on the shoulders of a fat person with no guarantees of systemic or institutional 'acceptance' of fatness. For many of my participants, their lessons on how to "present" fatness let alone their Blackness began with families.

[62] The expression "f*ck flattering" entails wearing clothing smaller than one's dress size to emphasize fatness while also giving a critical snob to designers who refuse to extend their sizes for fat and super fat bodies.
[63] Eve Sedgwick's concept of "coming out" and her publication *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) are seminal to queer studies in that it challenged the structural binary opposition of heterosexual vs. homosexual as the only two options as too limiting in its upholding of heteronormativity. A significant aspect of "coming out" whether within the context of queerness or fatness is its temporality. One may be faced with "coming out" in different spaces, places and at different times throughout their lives according to the social interaction. It is an ongoing process.

Pat, for example, details how her mother's obsession with her own body size changing from thin to fat as she aged has been very influential on Pat's concerns today with the size and proportion of her body, especially her stomach.

Another participant, Amina also discussed her concerns with her 'changing' fatness as she aged such as her looser skin, things "drooping down." Unlike the usual "obesity rhetoric" that foregrounds biomedical discourses on fat bodies, often times without the presence or expertise of actual fat bodies, the lived body stories of my participants illuminate the social, cultural, raced, gendered and classed meanings they make of their body materiality through the critical standpoint of actually having lived in them. In most cases participants attest to the social and cultural currency of a "good fat" vs. a "bad fat" (Bias, 2014) body.

Some participants further extend this to also theorize about the differences between the social acceptability, desirability and commodification of "White fatness" vs. "Black fatness" especially as several participants, despite their sexual orientation, shared the opinion that Black heterosexual men will often date White fat women but not Black ones. This participant observation was made despite their further observation that fat on Black women is characterized as tighter, shapelier and less "rolly" than fat on White bodies. The former was preferable to all participants but Steff, who identified as both Black and white and did not discuss this idea of 'white fat' vs. 'black fat.' Lexis, also differed in that she saw it as somewhat easier for her to have 'curves' because of her race and indicated that it's more acceptable for Black women to have some size than their white counterparts. Lexis' desire to exaggerate her curves and to want to work with her personal trainer towards a firm "bigger, rounder booty" and to have "fat in all the right places" speaks to what other participants discussed in terms of their characterization of 'black fat.' While some of my participants such as Steff didn't discuss raced fat, for my

participants who specifically identified dating Black men, they indicated feeling like there are different standards allotted to fat white women than to themselves as fat Black women when it comes to dating or desirability. While listening to the women's opinions on the 'racing' of fatness, I began to theorize around what I refer to as 'fat racialization'. In sociology the term racialization describes the essentialization process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a group, relationship or social practice that does not think of itself as such. In the majority of my participants' opinions on differently 'raced' fatness, what emerges is their realization of how fatness and its gendered and raced interpretation shifts depending on the fat body in question. According to the majority of my participants, they believe fatness, and more specifically fatness on white women's bodies characterized as "not solid and very jiggly," as Nana described, is read more favourably at least in terms of desirability from Black men.

The idea of jiggling, 'loose' fat, dovetails into the discomfort participants shared in regards to their stomachs. For Pat it was primarily about proportion. Her large stomach often made her feel disproportionate and she associated it with swelling and undesirability – a message she'd first received from her mother. As Pat expressed on fat Black women, "there's this kind of stereotype that larger-sized women are accepted within our community. It's true to an extent but you still have to have a small waist and big butt. My butt's big but it's flat. And my breasts aren't necessarily proportionate…So I don't reap the benefits of that."

Pat, similar to other participants, referenced their sexuality and more specifically the role of intimate partners (or at least the experience of attempting to find an intimate other) and desirability as significant to the shaping of their body stories. For Pat, she shared that she discloses her childhood bullying to her intimate partners so they are aware of her vulnerabilities and her boundaries. Becky, who is in a same sex relationship, discussed the significance of her

partner. According to Becky, her partner's love of her body "at any size" has helped her feel more comfortable, sensual and confident in the skin she's in. Lexis, who identifies as pansexual and is married reflected on the rejection she often felt from Black boys in high school and hypothesized that this may be at the root of her many interracial relationships. Amina, shared her frustrations with dating in the queer community where queer members may fight for fat liberation but will seldomly date the "fat girl." For Steff, who remarked about her amazing husband who never comments negatively about her body weight and who, "won't even take a cheap shot at her during an argument," her sexuality was both a danger and a saviour as she described:

> I think as soon as I tapped into my sexuality I became dangerous. Um, dangerous to myself – sometimes. But dangerous in a good way, too, you know, meaning that I was a force to be reckoned with as soon as I reconciled my own sexuality and as soon as I harnessed it and began to use it as part and parcel to my body image, to the way I carried myself and my being as a whole versus working against it and desexualizing myself by effectively dressing like a guy, dressing like a gangster, dressing in baggy suits and trying to be one of the boys. As soon as I started being one of the girls, all of a sudden, I was elevated to a completely different level. Because not only was I one of the girls, I was a girl like no one had ever seen before, because you're not supposed to like curvy women. But you do and you don't know why, you know? And then I bucked that on top of that because I'm mixed. I buck it again because I date women and men, right? So, I just do my best to blow every stereotype out the window when I walk into a room.

My participants reimagine their fatness within and outside of limiting constructs through their clothing choices. They also navigate social interactions with behaviours such as presenting with more smiles and gestures of "niceties" as Pat expressed she has done, to play into fat joviality stereotypes. Participants' behaviours also reflect their decisions made about when and how to exact performances of femininity which they feel they can leverage against fat and Black stigma for more positive readings of their body in particular spaces. Participants recognize various social messaging on fatness and while these do have an impact, my participants have their own perspectives on fatness. For some, such as Nana, their personal feelings about their fatness do not echo dominant anti-fat discourse:

> I like how I look and I think I look fucking cute. If I didn't want to look like this then lose weight. When it comes to the whole 'woe is me attitude,' I'm not with you on that. My body is chosen. It's my choice and if I don't like it I can drop weight. Anyone can. This is the way I want to look. I feel uncomfortable when I get too small. In terms of health, I may not be the healthiest person but neither is my sister and she's fucking skinny. I think how our bodies feel in the sense of ailment has everything to do with a psychological state. If I am depressed and mad at who I am that's bad fat because I'm 'woe is me' lagging around. If I am positive and I am good with myself as I am then I have no time for 'woe is me.' I've got things to do.

Learned meanings of fat and fatness are contextually relative. Meanings of fat are not only mutable but they also have culturally historical and geographical implications in that who is or was considered fat during points of history or in particular locations can and do shift

(Richardson, 2010; McPhail, 2017). This exemplifies the temporality of fat/ness. Furthermore, as indicated by several of my participants' memories and experiences during their Black girlhood documented they were not 'aware' of their fat/ness until they were outed as fat by a significant other such as a parent, relative or another trusted adult in which the label of fat was understood and explicitly defined as a label of disappointment, which served as evidence of their 'transgressive' body such as Amina's parents friends calling her fat when she merely enjoyed pushing out her stomach like a superhero or 'care bear' to demonstrate her strength and as she said to emulate what she saw as her father's strength in his physicality and Becky's aunt who would refer to her as the "fat niece." Amina's father went as far as to show her images in magazines of white and thin children when a modelling agency told the family Amina was "too fat to model." In these examples, my participants *learned* fat and through these interactions 'realized' they were fat and more so that their fatness was frowned upon. The concepts of 'biopedagogies' and the more liberating 'body-becoming pedagogies' are relevant to my participant body stories as they can be used to demonstrate the constructed and circulated societal curriculums on fatness and how identity gets addressed.

In "Biopower, Biopedagogies and the Obesity Epidemic" (2009), Jan Wright uses the term biopedagogy to, "describe the normalising and regulating practices in schools and disseminated more widely through the web and other forms of media, which have been generated by escalating concerns over claims of global 'obesity epidemic'" (2). Rice, in *Obesity in Canada: Critical Perspectives* (Ellison, McPhail et al., 2016), further describes biopedagogies (MacNeill & Rail, 2010; Rich, 2010, 2011; Evans & Rich, 2011; Wright, 2009) as the "loose collection of information, advise, and instruction about bodies and health, often moralizing or lecturing in tone, that works to control people by using praise and shame alongside 'expert

knowledge' to urge their conformity to weight norms," (2016: 424; Chandler & Rice, 2013; Rice, 2014). Biopedagogies builds on Foucault's (1984) concept of 'biopower', the governance and regulation of individuals and populations through practices associated with the body.

In my participants' body stories, it is evident that they experienced 'biopedagogies' from family, school, the workplace, social interactions, and through fashion as consumers. However, similar to what Rice suggests in her proposed theory of body-becoming pedagogies as opposed to biopedagogies (2016: 433; Chandler & Rice, 2013), some of my participants' involvement in community activisms through fat activisms, fatshion blogging, their autonomy over their fashion choices, burlesque, kink or otherwise provides some possibilities, where they are able to access an 'alterity of happiness' *in* [their] disability and embodied difference such as fatness (Chandler & Rice, 2013: 237) rather than in spite of it, while still being able to express rage in an unjust, oppressive world (243). I further discuss my participants' self-definitions and valuations in the next Chapter. As Rice argues in "Rethinking Fat: From Bio to Body-Becoming Pedagogies" (2015), a body-becoming approach to fatness would posit that neither genetics nor health habits nor social structures alone determine weight; instead, the relation between weight and health would vary depending on how people's bodily selves are perceived and treated in the world. An approach like this allows us to think more widely and possibly more excitingly about what bodies can be and how we are *learned* into being. I now move to the second and last theme of this Chapter 5 discussion: Social Forces as Generalized Others: Weighing in On Trauma.

Social Forces as Generalized Others: Weighing in on Trauma

Fancy, like my other participants, spoke to the direct impact of trauma and social forces they had lived through – both everyday and systemic – on their bodies and how they viewed

themselves. Fancy offers a poignant reflection on feeling "uncomfortably Canadian":

> I grew up in primarily white environments and as such um, I, um had a lot of self-esteem issues…I always knew I had the gift, I've got the degree, I'm talented and I'm quite bright but for some reason it never showed in Canada…I wasn't seen… It's not how I've been treated…and that's something that I had to recognize and I had to struggle with growing up and as a result, I have really struggled with feelings of worthlessness, you know. Like if I had to die and have a gravestone in Canada, I would put on my grave "uncomfortably Canadian." I will always be uncomfortably Canadian as I just feel Canada has this, um, overlying cultural mosaic to kinda sweep over the fact they're internally racist… The colour of your skin always matters.

For Fancy, who had been sexually violated on several occasions by men in her family and other influential men in her life, such as employers, and has lived with systemic racism and oppressive experiences in the mental healthcare system, she expressed that speaking about her body has not been easy. In response to their traumas, Fancy and Becky, who disclosed her traumatic experience with familial homophobia after being outed as gay by a relative, described feeling like they didn't have bodies at all at times. For Fancy, to cope with her history of sexual violence, experiences in mental health institutions, and systemic racism, she tended to "externalize" as she described it to talk about other people's body issues as opposed to her own and would often use others' stories as stand-ins for her own. In response to poor mental health supports in both America and Canada, Fancy expressed an instance where she resorted to self-harm as a response to systemic injustices:

> I felt so guilty…I felt like if everyone was turning in on me, I should turn in on myself…and then I thought this was all so unjust that I would make a mark to make sure that I would be able to tell my story that they would know. So, I decided to bite myself. So, I actually bit myself. It never mattered what I thought about myself or my body because the external world had more say on my health management on who I was and my own sanity.

For Becky, who was navigating through temporary housing and financial burdens, she often wasn't conscious of her body as she was just trying to survive and deal with the public shame of being outed within both her immediate and extended family. Becky Thompson's (1992; 1994) concept of body consciousness resonates. In her research on racialized and queer women's experiences with eating problems, Thompson argues that women's eating problems may also be their attempts at coping with physical, sexual and systemic violences against their identities and thus their bodies. Thompson discussed the concept of body consciousness to express that due to the devaluation marginalized women face through oppressive social interactions and social forces some of them loose sight of their bodies in an attempt at disassociation and disembodiment. This was the case for Becky who experienced extensive discomfort and disassociation with her body when she was outed as queer and then had to leave her family's home.

Social forces have shaped the body stories participants shared with me. They've shared moments of body dissatisfaction and celebration, adolescent eating problems, physical self-harm, suicide attempts, anxiety, depression, community building and other coping methods and body

management tactics in response to the stigma and traumas imposed on their raced, gendered and sized embodiment. Body stories further debunk the myth that Black girls and women are not concerned with or impacted by societal pressures regarding normalized body size, beauty or skin-tone ideals. In fact, the ongoing 'mental gymnastics' I observe in my participants' body stories, some of which I would argue are subconsciously and viscerally located, such as the preoccupation with constructing the 'right' image, vocal cadence in conversations, a smile and air of happiness even when their anxieties were high in uncomfortable situations all in order to be viewed as jovial. The 'juggling act' of occupying space as Black and fat women is further evidence to the impact of societal pressures of aesthetically belonging. The Government of Canada, Public Health Agency outlines the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)[64] as key factors in determining health quality within a public health approach. Currently racism and appearance-based discrimination, which could include size and weight, are not explicitly named as key determinants[65] although there is ongoing evidence of the impact of race, fat phobia and appearance-based discrimination on people's mental health and their ability to access resources.

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[64] For a comprehensive analysis of SDOH see editor Dr. Dennis Raphael's (2016) *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives 3rd ed*. Dr. Raphael argues for a move from an illness model to a wellness paradigm if we are to make Canadians the healthiest persons possible. I argue that the impact of appearance-based discrimination namely fat phobia, the social stigma of size accompanied by the structural manifestation of this through spatial discrimination demonstrated via washrooms, changerooms, classroom chairs or health diagnostic machines (i.e. MRIs) that cannot accommodate fat or superfat bodies are also direct factors – arguably social determinants – impacting the physical, mental and social health of fat people. Rather than creating public policy to improve the lives of those experiencing barriers, policy is often more concerned with those said to be more likely to make "unhealthy lifestyle choices" due to their life conditions (4). It is easy to see how neoliberal 'victim' blaming and more pointedly obesity rhetoric ant-fat ideologies are perpetuated through this type of public framing. Similarly, with racism, the current practice of racial-profiling, carding and the mental, physical and economic consequences of this is also a social determinant of health.

[65] Current list of key determinants: Income and Social Status; Social Support Networks; Education and Literacy; Employment/Working Conditions; Social Environments; Physical Environments; Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills; Healthy Child Development; Biology and Genetic Endowment; Health Services; Gender and Culture. Source: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html#determinants.

Dr. Onye Nnorom, of the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, has urged public health officials to recognize racism as a social determinant and add it to the list of key determinants that help or hinder health outcomes (February 21, 2017, Toronto Star Online). Other U.S-based researchers have investigated the health outcomes related to weight and race-based bullying of adolescents and have found direct linkages between stigma-based bullying, increased blood pressure, weight gain and decreased self esteem (Rosenthal, Earnshaw et al., 2013). The myth that suggests weight discrimination serves as a motivator for weight loss has been routinely discredited. The research further illustrates that discrimination due to socially devalued group membership, identity or characteristics such as size and race impact the person's physical, economic health and also mental health (Rosenthal, Earnshaw et. al., 2013). This research substantiates the argument for a community and culturally relevant and reflective approach to mental wellbeing. Cultural health psychology uses an integrated approach to health that seeks a balance of emotional, mental and physical health, and especially views cultural values and norms as a major factor in how health is constructed and practiced (Kazarian & Evans, 2001). A key feature of this area of psychology is the view that individual and community wellness, rather than the absence of disease and dysfunction, is the ultimate goal (Wilson, 2009: 56). Considering the entrenched disdain for fatness and the devaluation of blackness, participant experiences such as Fancy's within mental health institutions become all too emblematic.

According to mental health and skin colour discrimination expert Ronald E. Hall, western perceptions of Black African people, long institutionalized through Western colonization, play a significant role in how issues that directly affect them are studied and the importance given to those issues (Hall, 2005). Hall, who's work is influenced by Frantz Fanon and his scholarship on

the psychological effects of racism and systemic othering (2008/1952), argues that the Eurocentric framework becomes the common denominator for understanding and interpreting African behaviour and what is deemed important to study (122). Western psychologists, Hall argues, have institutionally not given account to the significance of skin colour among African descended people within psychology practice. They have also unintentionally ignored the role skin colour, skin colour privilege (or lack thereof) and associated self-concept has in how Black people perceive themselves and their overall psychological wellness (Hall, 2005; 2013). Hall argues that western psychologists', attempts to comprehend stereotypes, discrimination and various behavioural and psychological phenomena are an exercise in futility if they are oblivious to the implication of skin colour. Race, Hall explains, has so long been couched in "science" that skin colour has by default been scientifically subjugated (124). Further investigation into the salience of skin colour in the psychological lives of Africans is therefore critical according to Hall because the clinician's – whether white, Black or otherwise racialized – ability and willingness to critically and culturally interrogate race and racism as contributing factors to Black mental health and wellbeing will inevitably impact clinical practice.

The call for a deeper analysis of skin's salience is echoed by gender and sexuality scholars Sheila L. Cavanagh, Angela Failler and Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst. They argue that skin is often overlooked, conflated with, or only seen as a stand-in for the body, which obscures skin's significance as a subject of inquiry itself – that which envelops the body. In their publication, *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis* (2013), skin and the representation of skin can signify both beauty and abjection at once or evoke attraction and repulsion simultaneously which draws attention to skin's capacity to bear multiple and contradictory meanings. Furthermore, individual experiences of skin must be recognized as located within particular cultural and social

contexts. As such, “belying its status as mere surface matter, skin becomes a site for the projection and exposure of deep-seated cultural, political and physical investments” (2013: 2). In the next chapter, among other examples of accommodative and resistive behaviours, I document statements shared by my participants on the importance of their skin and its role in their self-definition and self-valuation against traumatic social interactions and social forces.

I began my dissertation with a body story of my own which chronicled a traumatic social interaction I endured as a child on public transit. Unbeknownst to me, that interaction was an early lesson on intersecting violence and the influence of social forces on behaviour. “If you weren’t such a f*cking fat, Black, b*tch you wouldn’t be afraid of my dog!” he shouted at me. As a child, the particular attack on my weight and his pushing me with his legs wide open into the corner made me shrink. It wasn’t the first nor the last time I would have my body attacked due to perceived inappropriateness of its size. The additional layers of sexism and racism was what I would further unpack as an adult and it would allow me to deeply understand how his fat hatred explicitly augmented his misogynoir or vice versa. This was a trifecta of hate – his racism, sexism and sizeism, peaked by his toxic masculinity and white skin privilege, demanded I not have the right to take up space on the RT let alone exist.

All the women interviewed referred to their sense of social perceptions in childhood and later their awareness of social forces in adulthood such as the erasure of Blackness. For example, Fancy’s story recounted in the opening quote to this section indicates her ‘uncomfortably Canadian’ challenge with being in mostly white environments and experiencing racism in mental healthcare. In another example Steff chronicles being ridiculed by adult educators who saw her size as incongruent with her physical prowess as a student athlete. Amina, reflected on the ridicule of family friends, her parents and modeling coaches in regards to her fatness. Many

participant reflections of childhood and youth are arguably more than children should have had to bare. There has been a historic and contemporary pandemic of not *seeing* Black children as *children* due to a matrix of social injustices. This further contributes to the erasure of Black childhood and further compounds how Black girls and women are interacted with and perceived. Fancy's experience with accesses to healthcare speaks to this:

> I was young trying to manage...I'd had counsellors who never looked like me tell me my rapes were my fault and ask me what I was wearing…why I was in whatever situation. I was young. Like people in the health industry will treat depression like it's a cold or flu you caught. But they don't look at the history, you know the sociocultural history, what you've experienced such as sexual trauma to figure out why I'm depressed. It's not fair for us to have a history of colonization and post colonialism that we can't talk about. We couldn't talk at school … even family talks were sometimes inappropriate…so when I actually had side effects from all these isms and stigmas and you actually try to advocate for your own health because you just want to be whole as a person, be healed and move on you are just slapped with the label of mental illness. What about the rest of my story?

In the 2017 report "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" (Epstein, Blake & González, 2017) based on the precedent-setting American study by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, data conveyed that adults view Black girls as "less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers," especially in the age range of five to 14 years old. The research, collected through questionnaires with predominantly white and self-identified female adult participants, showed that compared to White girls of the same above

age group, survey participants perceived Black girls as needing less nurturing, protection, support and comfort than their White counterparts (2017:1). Furthermore, Black girls were perceived as more independent, and assumed to know more about adult topics and sex.

The report addresses the larger issue of the adultification of Black girls and more broadly the theory of Adultification of Black children (2017: 4-6) which refers to the perception of Black children as less innocent and more adult-like than white children of the same age. The report outlines the possible causal connection between adultification of Black girls and the differential treatment they receive based on their perceived behaviours and/or race and gender-based stereotypes across a diverse range of public systems, including education, juvenile justice, and child welfare. According to the report, adults place distinct views and expectations on Black girls that characterize them as developmentally older than their white peers, especially in mid-childhood and early adolescence – critical periods for healthy identity development (Epstein, Blake & González, 2017).

This notion of adultification provides yet another intersectional lens from which to view the ways in which my Black participants' childhood bodies may have been more susceptible to the various societal violences some of my participants referenced. For example, body shaming in the form of teasing and weight-based body policing by educators and coaches as Steff recounts while she participated in childhood sports, to incidents of sexual and verbal attacks on their person as discussed by Fancy, Steff, Amina and others. In the case of Steff's sexual assault, she specifically referenced being seen by some of the older men she would hang out with as numerically older than she was based on her body's physicality in particular her height and body shape. According to Monique W. Morris, society often responds to Black girls as if they are fully developed adults (Morris, 2016).

The assignment of more adult-like characteristics to the expressions of young Black girls, Morris argues, is a form of age compression, which not only sees them as older than they are but also layers many of the negative stereotypes associated with Black women on their character and their physical bodies. Stereotypes layered on to Black girls' bodies include being perceived as "sexually promiscuous, hedonistic, and in need of socialization" (Blake, Rutler & Smith, 2015). In reference to one of the key theoretical frameworks informing this dissertation, symbolic interactionism, people interact with people, objects and ideas based on the socially constructed meanings placed on said people, objects and ideas. Due to histories of colonization, cultural imperialism and continued intersectional anti-Black racism, Black girls and women's bodies as Black and fat are more prone to experience the challenges experienced by my participants (Gabriel & Tate, 2017; Tate, 2005, 2015, 2018). Reflecting on her own experiences, Pat shared that in her opinion, "Black bodies, female bodies, folks who don't fit into the gender binary, persons whose sexualities don't fit into heteronormative means, fat bodies and how all of these intersect with ability" are most marginalized in the city and prone to experiencing violence. Pat theorized certain readings of her fat, Black body in public spaces as manifestations of "white violence" and discussed how she has observed her body's anxious response to these interactions and microaggressions manifested through a nervous clumsiness that she recognizes as part of who she is today. For example, she identified spilling a handful of coins at a grocery store as a direct bodily response to the 'white violence' she experienced due to a social interaction with a white consumer.

Differences in physical development such as body height, weight or shape based on the onset of puberty may also play a role in the adultification of Black girls since pediatric development evidence has suggested that, on average, Black girls enter into puberty (i.e.

increased height, weight and skin fold measurements) at a faster rate than White girls and are therefore often assumed to be older than they are (Morrison & Bruce et al., 1994). Reflecting on the many unwanted cat calls I'd receive as a child from men on public transit, the sidewalk and once outside of a Scarborough church when I was approximately 13 years old, who even after telling the two of them my age, they insisted I was lying and that I was older and "thick," adultification resonates. As a teenager, I remember being hypervigilant of adult men in public spaces and at times adult women in social spaces (i.e. family gatherings, community events and stores) where I'd often be given the 'compliment' of how 'mature' I looked or how "big and tall" I was. I just wanted to be a kid and seen as such. According to Morris,

> "…Along this truncated age continuum, Black girls are likened more to adults than to children and are treated as if they are willfully engaging in behaviours typically expected of Black women…This compression…[has] stripped Black girls of their childhood freedoms [and] renders Black girlhood interchangeable with Black womanhood"
>
> (Morris, 2016: 34).

The adultification of Black girls sets the perfect stage for the pervasive 'controlling images' (Collins, 1991, 2009) of Black women and our bodies that have persisted in various iterations for centuries.

Several of my participants referred to 'controlling' media images of fatness/blackness that act as strong social forces and therefore impact life while living fat, black and as a woman. They either spoke about a lack of representations of *any* kind of blackness/fatness, or the *kind* of representation that constructed and limited how they saw themselves in society. These controlling images function to uphold whiteness as the superior embodiment. As Olson argues in

Black Children in Hollywood Cinema: Cast in Shadow (2017), the visual display of Black bodies has systematically been juxtaposed with that of white Bodies therefore casting Black bodies as abnormal (64). Olson furthers her argument by explaining how Black feminized bodies historically were, "defeminized as a strategy to raise the status of white womanhood" (66). This strategy, according to Olson, made it easier for white slave owners to rape Black women and girls. Historicizing the assumptions that underlie Black bodies is a necessary project in order to contextualize the way in which Hollywood cinema further adds to these depictions of Black bodies (Cheers, 2018). Black girls and women are often positioned as aimless, angry, and always in or welcoming prohibited behaviour. Sexually, they are often portrayed as completely desexualized as in the case of the fat jovial yet cantankerous mammy caricature (Cheers, 2018), oversexualized in promiscuous flings or unhealthy relationships with stereotypically negative young Black men often resulting in their single teenaged pregnancies. As my participants indicated, popular culture and representation, misrepresentation, or in some cases lack there of, of Black women in film, television and magazines had a direct impact not only on how they saw their bodies during their childhood, adolescence and early adulthood but on how they felt they could see their bodies. These images had both real time and aspirational implications for participants and I discuss several of the movies mentioned below. According to Nana, she felt dark-skinned Black women within North American cinema were rarely cast in roles of resilience. She felt these roles were primarily reserved by casting directors for light-skinned Black actors. Nana shared that she doesn't think society's dominant body ideals will ever change:

> It needs to stay the same so that these industries like sports, media, fitness can make money on us. It's our mindsets that need to change. We can't expect much from the

media – the media must keep us insecure. It's a formula and to keep the dollars flowing we've got to keep the insecurities flowing. It's their job.

This is evident with the character of dark-skinned Chenille Reynolds in the 2001 urban drama *Save the Last Dance* which was played by award-winning African-American actress Kerry Washington and directed by African-American Thomas Carter. In this high school drama, set against the 'mean streets' of Chicago, Reynolds, a poor teen, is often begging, angry at the top of her lungs for her irresponsible teenage Black boyfriend to step up and assume his fatherly duties. In stark contrast, Reynolds' brother, a dark-skinned black boy who excels in high school and has dreams of becoming a doctor, falls in love with the white teenage female character who has moved across town from safety and wealth [code: suburban whiteness] to the impoverished and crime-ridden high school after her mother's death since she must move in with her deadbeat white, working-class father who lives in the 'hood' blocks from her new high school. The high school serves as a cinematic signifier of the deep 'underworld' – the black urban 'ghettoized' neighborhood and all its stereotypical trappings.

Melissa Harris-Perry in *Black Female Sexualities* (Melancon & Braxton, 2015) discusses the way in which certain visual tropes of Black women on screen, such as the character of the enslaved Black, dark-skinned woman in the film adaptation of Solomon Northup's memoir *12 Years a Slave* played by Kenyan-Mexican actress Lupita Nyong'o, reinforce the general message that the viewing public is most interested in seeing Black women's bodies in what Harris-Perry describes as "utter corporeal destruction" subjected to "ferocious terror" (viii-ix). In the case of Nyong'o's character "Patsey" in *12 Years a Slave*, which won her an Academy Award for Best

Supporting Actress in 2013[66], her character is subject to unfathomable psychological, physical, and sexual abuse on screen. In the 1998 urban drama *Player's Club* directed by award-winning rapper and actor Ice Cube, main character Diana Armstrong, played by actress Lisa Raye, leaves home as a pregnant teen graduated from high school about to begin college. Raye's character Armstrong ends up stripping at the Players Club to afford tuition. During the film, her youngest teenage cousin Ebony, played by actress Monica Calhoun, comes to live with her because she's been passed over by her parents for her own bad behaviour. While under the supervision of Armstrong, Ebony also begins stripping, becomes an alcoholic and is later gang raped by a group of Black young and adult men in a nearby motel. Additional sexual violence, in this case incest, also reveals itself in the 1985 drama/historical period film *The Colour Purple* directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Whoopi Goldberg as the heart-wrenching child Celie. The film spans 40 years of Celie's life beginning with her childhood where viewers see her raped and impregnated multiple times by her father only to be sold as a child to "Mister" a man who could be her father played by Danny Glover. Throughout the film she is subject to unimaginable beatings, rapes and public shaming throughout her childhood, teen and adult life.

Lee Daniels' 2009 drama *Precious*, starring award-winning actress Gabourey Sidibe, as the 16-year-old, super fat, dark-skinned, illiterate girl Claireece "Precious" Jones, is another film which positions the young Black girl as tragic. Not only is Jones' mom physically abusive and consistently telling Jones how ugly she is, but Jones has also been impregnated twice by her absent father. She later contracts HIV in the film due to his child sexual abuse. In *Straight Out of*

[66] The sole Black woman to ever win a Best Actress Academy Award in its history was African-American actress Halle Berry in 2001 for her performance in Monster's Ball. Only seven Black actresses have won the Best Supporting Actress Academy Award. To place these numbers into context, the Academy Awards began in 1929. Adding injury to insult, almost every role won by Black performers has been critiqued for its stereotypical portrayal of Black personhood and its illustration of Black characters as pseudo-subjects.

Compton (2015) directed by African-American F. Gary Gray, which was dubbed an unofficial biopic of the award-winning then teenaged group *NWA*, young Black girls, particularly light-skinned, in countless numbers are often portrayed in hypersexualized swimwear, underaged and positioned as sexual property to the music artists. These films uphold the perverse oversexualization of Black women and girls' bodies while also perpetuating the disposability of their bodies as objects under the male gaze. It cannot be overlooked that all of these films I have mentioned are directed by men. These are mere examples representing popularized cinematography of Black girl and womanhood that, according to many of my participants, left them unsatisfied and seeking more empowering and multi-dimensional imagery in popular culture. While aspects of a racially constructed Black womanhood have been expropriated for others' [non-Blacks'] profits, convenience and amusement (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; 1984), for my participants seeing blackness on screen was comforting but the types of negative imagery left an indelible mark. As Anita Franklin explains in "Black Women and Self-Presentation: Appearing in (Dis)Guise," (2001) Black womanhood has historically been devalued in relation to White womanhood and especially those that are darker skinned or fatter are more prone to deeper dehumanization.

In "Is It Just Baby F(Ph)at? Black Female Teenagers, Body Size, and Sexuality" (2015), Courtney J. Patterson proports that adolescent Black girls with enlarged or fat sexualized organs are often subjected to a hypersexualized gaze by older men where the assumption is that their larger bodies automatically signify an "enlarged sexuality" (27). Patterson argues, while drawing upon Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, that due to Black teenage girls marginalized identities as "black, female, fat and teenager"(29), which she states can all be oppressed identities in the context of social relations, socioeconomic policy and resources, access

to power and knowledge, that "'f(ph)at'[67] Black girls occupy a particular social location that not only urges them to confront sexuality much earlier and more precariously than their (White) counterparts but also ties their adolescent sexual decisions to their overall identity" (29). This hypersexualization of Black teenage girl corpulence is echoed in my participant Steff's recounting of her sexual assault by older men in some cases 15 years her senior who befriended her as a teenager and subsequently raped her. The assumption of an enlarged sexuality coupled with larger sexual scripts that have marked fat feminized bodies as immoral, excessive, criminalized and deviant, thus stripped of humanity, make them more susceptible to violence (Morris, 2016). The sexualization and criminalization of Black bodies are social forces which in turn shape the dominant narrative of Black bodies as perverse.

Throughout this second theme: social forces as generalized others: weighing in on trauma, I documented examples of the intersecting race, gender and size-based discrimination and harassment[68] participants shared with me. Some of their experiences are specific to physical assault and gender-based violence. However, I do not presume to create a hierarchy of oppression. Verbal and non-verbal attacks, as the often-covert operative of racist and fat phobic microaggressions demonstrate, the powerful impact is felt nonetheless. These too are examples of gender-based violence and considering the current national recognition of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Canada, it is prudent that the impact of verbal [thus emotional] and appearance-based discrimination be validated and included as recognized forms of GBV within

[67] Patterson combines the terms baby "fat" and "phat" into "baby f(ph)at" to situate Black girls' fatness at the center of an intersectional analysis of race, body size, gender, age and sexuality (Patterson, 2015: 29). Her central question considers how this new terminology, informed by her analysis of the use of "baby phat" in a 2001 song by hip- hop group *De La Soul*, can provide insight into how fat Black girls view and make decisions about their sexualities. She also questions whether or not using words such as fat or "phat" that may come with more acceptability than the moral and medical disdain placed on "obese" or "obesity" can also create spaces for more possibilities for fat embodiment outside of the limited medicalized, deficit master narrative.

[68] I also employ the concept of body-based discrimination and harassment to describe body injustices in general.

this national conversation and its accompanying policies. I advocate for this through my community work. I unpacked my participant's offerings by drawing on, socially constructed ideologies – the social forces – that I argue have helped create a climate where these body injustices and particular readings of fat and Black girl and women's bodies can flourish.

In the next discussion chapter 6 'Bucking the System…,' I explore participants' strategies of accommodation, resistance and resilience, I discuss participant's reflections on the significance of their skin and central to this next chapter's discussion are my participant's sartorial choices in how they "put themselves together" through their clothes as part of their, self-definition and self-valuation.

CHAPTER 6: BUCKIN' THE SYSTEM: ACCOMMODATION, RESISTANCE & (AD)DRESSING IDENTITY: SELF-VALUATION & SELF-DEFINITION

In this chapter, I offer a discussion on my participants' personal and communal activisms or community-building efforts they are engaged in and their impact on my participants relationship with their bodies. I theorize these engagements as possible sites of participant self determination: their self-valuation and self-definition (Collins, 1986, 2009) where resistance if not resilience may occur as they grapple with the tensions of bumping up against idealized images and reimagining their own through their storytelling by way of their body stories My participants discuss the importance of clothing as a second skin to their identity construction and uncover how it may represent a form of respectability politics[69] as well as a disavowal of such. The last segment of the chapter on clothing is titled (Ad)Dressing Identity: Stylin' Out in Spaces & the Currency of Being Well "Put Together." This title is inspired by my participants who routinely spoke about the need to be "well put together" and the benefits – real, imagined or aspirational this provided. The chapter concludes with the participants' words on the significance of their skin as an important element of their resistance.

My participants have engaged in resistance and resilience building through their personal, political, and communal practices. Some have participated in fat activism sites, which is particularly necessary to document especially within a Canadian context. As fat studies and

[69] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the concept "the politics of respectability" often referred to as "respectability politics" in her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church* (1993) which chronicled the power of the role of Black women in making the Black church an institutional space for social and political justice amidst racism between 1880-1920. The Black church also became a place in which Black women could articulate empowering representations of Black girl and womanhood via clothing (i.e. "Sunday Best" or wearing their best attire to worship; providing clothing and food for those navigating poverty all while living within the tensions of sexism and the ongoing battles between black and white women's groups of the time.

activist Charlotte Cooper restates (2016), Andrea Shaw argues (2006) Black women are key figures in resisting fatphobic, sexist and racist normativity, but the gentrification of fat activism entails the erasure of people of colour from the movement and their replacement with a logic of white supremacy. “White supremacy in fat activism also precludes the potential contributions of people of colour to the movement in the future by establishing white people as its only legitimate agents (Cooper: 182). Based on my participants’ body stories, it is also crucial to challenge what activities in solitude or in larger groups constitutes fat activism. It is necessary to consider the privileges that allow for some women to openly participate in fat activisms of any kind and the barriers that may prevent others. All of the women except for Nana have engaged in online community participation through, for example fatshion blogging, Health at Every Size (HAES) forums, fat activism advocacy and through public performance such as dance and participation in local festivals and events. Amina, for example explains how the internet has helped her build resistance against “fatophobic people”. “I can go online and send fatophobic people the fucking link of um the fat gold medal weight lifter…articles, evidence that proves that fat isn’t bad.” For Amina, the one downside of online activism is her access to a computer which is limited due to financial barriers.

However, while fat activism has risen as a significantly recognized component of fat acceptance movements (Cooper, 2016), fat activism isn’t a one size fits all intervention. Certain iterations of ‘body positivity,’ reinforce a less radical more assimilative message compared to fat activism and can appropriate or misrepresent themselves as fat activism. Nana’s reasoning for not participating in fat activisms is because she believes at the core they are inadvertently ‘asking’ permission for fat bodies to exist and be accepted while still cleaving to what the mainstream thinks is acceptable as smaller fat bodies or fat bodies consistently on a journey to

becoming thinner fat bodies. These aspirational thinner fat bodies often become the new body ideal. And as Pat described, part of the performance of doing fat 'well' is being put together but, as with most beautification practices (Bartky, 1990), true 'success' lies in making it all look effortless. Therefore, similar to the problems many Black women indicated with the static term 'body image' and its discursive limits in connecting with many Black women's embodied experiences (Byrd & Solomon, 2005), so have my participants' body stories expanded my understanding of what 'fat activisms' can encompass. For these reasons, it is additionally crucial to document Black women's creation and participation in *any* practices – personal or communal – that allow for Black women to "clap back."

Self-definition, as a form of resistance according to Collins, involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images of Black womanhood and self-valuation stresses the content of Black women's self-definitions – namely replacing externally-derived images, and ideologies with authentic images, and narratives, of themselves. Furthermore, upon reflection on Collins' concept of "both/and", my participants gain power by resisting cultural norms, accommodating them, or both, depending on the situation (Collins, 2009; Tyner & Ogle, 2009). And in response to historicized and present experiences of race, gender and size-based discrimination, and the anxieties and self-doubt these everyday and systemic dislocations have caused for some participants, they have sought to create their own standards of self-evaluation. In doing this, Black feminist thought, from which the importance of Black women's self and collective redefining stems (Collins, 2009), is an integral part of my participants resisting the dehumanization, othering and objectification essential to fueling oppressive and interlocking social forces of domination.

One of my participants Lexis shared her experiences of discomfort in predominantly white and wealthy restaurant spaces she's attended with her white heterosexual, as she specified, husband. She has wondered if her blackness coupled with public readings of her body's corpulence identified her as out of place or unsophisticated. Deeply in touch with her corporeal marginality in such spaces, Lexis' discomfort represents that complicated, textured space of being both *inside* – the spouse of a white man with upper-middle class family affiliation – and *outside* of that space as a self-identified working-class individual married into middle-class sensibilities 'looking in'. As Collins expresses, "the "outsider within" status has provided a special standpoint of self, family, and society for Afro-American women" (Collins, 1986: S14). This status also resonates with my participants body stories and in the case of Lexis, a self-identified pansexual, go-go and burlesque dancer, sex worker, and a member of the kink community, her membership within these 'outsider' identities and counterpublics have assisted her in celebrating her body and adorning her curves publicly in racially and sexually diverse crowds. Counterpublics, such as the kink community for Lexis, are formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment (Warner, 2002). For Lexis, previous sex work, kink, and her dance performances such as go-go dancing and burlesque provide opportunities to reconcile her personal feelings regarding her body. In this excerpt, she reflects on the benefits of the kink community:

> Sex work encouraged me to be more explorative with my sexuality and helped me become a sexually confident person...I will always identify with the sex worker identity in terms of the struggle to have that seen as work, as legitimate work…Um with kink and

> identifying as a kinky person[70] it's definitely helped me see like how my body is desirable…The great thing about kinky people is they embrace the things they like that may be seen as being different from the societal norm…Not only is my body desirable but sexual connection on a mental level is really emphasized within kink.

Additionally, dancing for Lexis also helped her challenge people's perceptions of the dancer body. In D. Lacy Asbill's chapter, "I'm Allowed to be a Sexual Being: The Distinctive Social Conditions of the Fat Burlesque Stage" in *The Fat Studies Reader* (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009), Asbill discusses how fat burlesque dancers, through their erotic performance and re-presentation of their fat bodies, offers theirs and audience fat bodies the opportunity to invoke and respond to limiting cultural conceptions about their bodies and sexualities thus positively reframing and reworking what it means to be fat. The burlesque stage, albeit not a cure for anti-fat messages, provides a space where participating, experiencing and witnessing fat performance can provide a set of unique social conditions that can support the work of positive identity formation for fat women (Asbill, 2009). Lexis' sexual empowerment through her engagement with sex work or burlesque certainly troubles the assumption of sex work negatively impacting or representing women – especially Black women who have been long stereotyped as being hypersexual and spectacles for entertaining consumption (Shaw, 1999; Mowatt & French et al.,2013). For Lexis her performance signals her choice, her strength. She proudly embraces the label of "sex worker" as empowering and a significant part of who she is.

[70] A "Kinky person" according to Lexis is an individual who gets sexual gratification from BDSM activities.

In response to the racism and microaggressions Fancy has experienced, she shared that she likes to be alone and that this is a deeply valuable aspect of her selfcare. Alone, for Fancy, is not lonely:

> I'm great alone and love time by and for myself. I can love myself to death, you know what I mean? Like and do all the things that I need to do when I'm on my own to love myself and enjoy my quality of life. It's in groups that I have an issue and as such, um, because of racism, um and ostracization I dealt with in school, I ended up having social anxiety...Sometimes isolation provides protection where I don't have to worry about looking a certain way or what not…My solitude is a gift an opportunity to nurture myself…I'm at a point now where rather than socialization, I'm looking more to social justice.

Fancy, in chapter four, also expressed that her engagement with Facebook and taking selfies also assists with her esteem and provides an avenue for reimagining herself in a safer space. Being able to look back on previous pictures she's taken serves as a reminder for Fancy one she can look back on with more body confidence.

Becky, Pat, Nana and Amina mentioned the importance of seeing – representation – of other Black fat women online via fashion blogs, social media networks and community events to their identity as Black and fat women. And although some participants like Becky reflected on the progress still necessary within the blogging industry to adequately reflect racial diversity, she still identified seeing fashionable fat women online as integral to her increased body esteem. In

these excerpts Pat and Amina (respectively) reflect on how beneficial the ability to access imagery and community online has been in their lives:

> I started a Tumblr account and I've subscribed to lots of sites that celebrate Black women and Black women who are curvy…It's been a booster for me. Even though I don't buy clothes online it helps me see Black women in very sexy outfits putting themselves out there. It helps me reimagine how I can dress…I also talk about body experiences and share articles online…In community I surround myself with people who have an appreciation for Black bodies.
>
> Thank God for fat activism so I can shove articles and resources I access online in the faces of those who say you can't be healthy and fat. And I can like go online and see images of women who look like me and connect with people like Marilyn… I can shove Health at Every Size in their face [laughs]. I can see women who look like me in fancy outfits – even if I can't afford them and sometimes it's torture but it's still uplifting. If only I had these in my 20s and even now because of limited financial resources, I don't have a computer at home so my ability to access groups and information online isn't consistent you know.

Blogging and the online presence of fat, fashionable bodies was significant to all participants. Sociologist Catherine Connell's case study analyzes participants posts on the fashion blog "Fa(t)shion February for Femmes and Friends" (2013) which privileges fat, queer, femme fashion expression as well as ally perspectives of people of colour and disabled people,

who are excluded and Othered in fashion discourse (211). "Fa(t)shion February" serves as a space where members of subordinated social groups congregate to create alternate discourse that critique hegemonic narratives. As a virtual counterpublic, participants can publicly imagine more egalitarian and radical alternatives (Connell, 2013: 221). Though *Fa(t)shion February* represents a "subaltern counterpublic" (Fraser, 1990: 67) space for subaltern voices to speak and be seen (Spivak, 1988), Connell is careful not to romanticize it by noting how "obesity" discourse such as fat shaming through 'fat talk' (Elmen-Gruys, 2008) is equally present on the American blog and therefore as it liberates some, it still maintains and reinforces hegemonic bodily boundaries (Connell, 2013: 221). For example, the average person posting remains young, White, middle-class, and 'readably' feminine who may be larger than the 'accepted' thin ideal but not readably fat. These persons are often referred to as "inbetweenies" in fatshion culture those who are above a size 14 and may have some difficulty sourcing clothing in "straight" size stores but within fat activist or plus fashion circles at size 16 or 18 they'd be considered on the smaller end of the spectrum (Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013: 279). Plus, or 'fatshion' blogging, while it allows for a form of self-definition for the bloggers and their audiences as my participants express, is not immune from criticism.

According to fatshion lifestyle blogger Natalie Perkins, some fatshion blogs[71] originally start off aligned with fat activist sensibilities. While some continue this way, others, due largely to the corporatization of some fatshion blogs and lucrative collaborations some fatshion bloggers

[71] I created a fatshion blog equity survey as an educational tool to help visitors evaluate the efficacy of the site as a fat-positive blog. Some key questions I encourage visitors to reflect on include: What visual images (of the blogger) are visible? Is it full body images, only headshots or a blend? What types of fat bodies are represented and which ones are missing? What is the message of the content and are they using language germane to fat liberation? Language is important because it allows us to get a sense of how "agency works through language" and also a fatshion bloggers potential of queering fatshion through their choice of words on their site (LeBesco, 2004:3; 2004). I also encourage visitors to analyze advertisements on blogs and blog partnerships. Corporatization of the blog can indicate whether a fashion blog is taking a weight neutral stance or otherwise radical response or if it is more aligned with dominant anti-fat discourse i.e. promoting weight loss surgery, diets or clothing as 'slimming.'

negotiate with retailers, begin to assimilate. The message of activism can get severely diluted by corporate brand, advertising messages and demands that may be counterproductive to fat activism aspirations (Andrew & Fairclough, 2015; Perkins, 2012). For instance, reviewing the blog names of two popular American fatshion bloggers who were among the first to garner international attention such as Jay Miranda and Gabi Gregg can provide further insight on this notion of potential dilution. Gabi Gregg's blog started in October 2008 and was called Young, Fat and Fabulous. Miranda's, created in 2009, was called Fatshionable. Currently, Gregg's blog is GabiFresh and Miranda's is Jay Miranda (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012: 8). It could be argued that these name changes simply reflect the bloggers' desire to have their real names more prominently displayed to their observers but the removal of the word 'fat' from their blog titles, especially as their blogs increase in popularity, income potential, and corporate partnerships cannot go unnoticed. Today, many fat fashion bloggers will solely identify themselves as fashion bloggers or the more contemporary term "social media influencer". In the next section, I extend the thematic discussion by exploring more in-depth how my participants have (ad)dressed their identities through their sartorial choices.

(Ad)Dressing Identity: Stylin' Out in Spaces & the Currency of Being Well "Put Together"

Participant stories about their experiences, memories in and relationships with clothing from girlhood to adult life shed light on the way in which Black and fat respectability politics, along with participants social interactions across different times and spaces influence how they might elect to represent their bodies, shape-shift, clothes-switch or clothes-mesh, especially in situations where the desire for social currency is significant. My participants body stories, and in particular their relationship with their attire, demonstrates clothing, including underclothes such

as girdles, as a critical component of their impression management (Goffman, 1959). Nana, Becky, Amina, Pat, Lexis and Steff express this in their stories for instance and their accounts will be central in the following section. My participants' attention to their sartorial presentation is evidenced further by their efforts at both accommodating and resisting dominant body ideals. Their choices are illuminated through the sociological concepts of identity work[72] and remedial work[73] especially within the context of the workplace and other public spaces as participants discussed where they are interacting with others while seeking the best possible interaction. My participants' strategic wardrobe choices, even those set to disrupt normalized body ideals, coupled with their noted behaviour modifications mirror the additionally required and unpaid emotional, aesthetic and affective labour[74] plus-size models in Czerniawski's *Fashioning Fat: Inside Plus-Size Modeling* (2015) accounted. Nana's fashion consumption for example illustrates how these concepts function. Her bright and bold sartorial choices, her extraverted "flaunt it" attitude, her "gift of gab" and her international travel to acquire fashionable plus clothing is still arguably part of the unpaid emotional labour and financial commitment necessary to 'present' fatness in an anti-fat world. It is arguably Nana's identity work as her presentation also elicits an

[72] "Identity work, as an emotional process, frequently occurs when people possess an identity that attracts either strong moral opposition or ardent public support… Identity work captures the work people do individually and collectively to signify who they are, who they want to be, and how they expect others to treat them. This signaling allows people to engage in coordinated social interaction" (Fields, Copp et al., 2006).

[73] "When our self-images are threatened or undermined by what unfolds in an interaction, we usually react by doing some kind of remedial work. In part, this is to repair the interaction, thereby helping it to proceed smoothly, but it is also to sustain positive self-feelings and a coherent self-concept" (Sandstrom, Lively et al., 2014).

[74] In *Fashioning Fat,* a sociological, ethnography into the world of plus-size modeling, Czerniawski details the often unspoken and unpaid labour models must attend to in order to 'perform' plus appropriately to the various industry gatekeepers such as booking agents, photographers and fashion designers they interact with and who inevitably hire them. Nana's affective labour is tapped into when she walks into the room ready to own it, work it and essentially making a statement with "a presence that demands attention, is hard to ignore, or stands out" (Wissinger, 2004). Her emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) in her ability to manage both hers and hopefully her audience's "feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Czerniawski, 2015: 74) further supports a presentation of what could be read as a 'good fatty' archetype (Bias, 2014) Although, wearing bright colours that call attention to fatness, I might argue is more inline with what I'd term a 'rad fatty' one seen as too radical and pushing the boundaries of permittable fashion for our fat bodies. According to the audience, the fashionable colourful rad fatty's reading may be positive, negative or indifferent.

affective response in her audience which is essential to her having positive interactions with her clients or colleagues. Theorized differently, Linda Alcoff's concept of "tacit body knowledges"[75] (1999: 272) also extends meaning to Nana's enclothed experiences which can't fully be labelled as either accommodation or resistance. Nana's knowledge of the hypervisibility of her fat body coupled with the negative "knowledge" of fatness in our culture (Murray, 2008, 2010) makes it worth the financial investment to 'buck the system' through her reassigning self definition of her fatness as fashionable and brimming with "fabulousness" (Moore, 2018) [76] worthy of being seen and adorned unapologetically. Tacit body knowledges construct bodies within every social interaction but these constructions are not concretized. They can and are often reimagined.

The function and purpose of clothing in the lives of all my participants is a crucial aspect of how they navigate through the "double wammy", as Amina identified it, of embodying both blackness and fatness. Their desire for particular expressions or performances of gender – particularly stereotypical "feminine dress" expectations – and race play a significant role in their clothing decisions and what they desire their clothing to communicate and mean in varying social settings[77]. Not only are they mediating between size-based body ideals as fat people who often experience difficulties finding affordable, fashionable clothing that fit and are not matronly

[75] "Tacit body knowledges" from Linda Alcoff's essay "Towards a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment" (1999). Tacit body knowledges are implicitly understood and implied constructions and knowledges about bodies.
[76] Madison Moore uses the concept "fabulousness" as a political mode of expression in western popular culture. Moore posits fabulousness as a queer aesthetic "…an essence that allows marginalized people and social outcasts to regain their humanity and creativity…" (Moore: preface – pages n/a) Moore's *Fabulous* (2018) contends that one's dress or being cannot always embody 'fabulousness' but for those who elect to engage in what Moore describes as the "risk and the rise" of living as a 'spectacle' rather than following rules and blending in both the rewards and the costs are multifaceted. Being 'fabulous' can challenge the cultural script of what acceptable raced, gendered or sized bodies for instance look like.
[77] The concept of multimodality often referenced in relation to communication and social semiotics, can be understood as a, "multiplicity of images…a more mixed set of semiotic resources or modes used for meaning making," (Gourlay, 2010: 80). Visual, digital and moving images extend meaning-making and knowledge construction beyond the one dimensional. Clothing and the act of dressing both at home in a private wardrobe, in a store change room or virtually online via fatshion blogs, is a form of multimodal communication: a code with largely symbolic meaning.

or located in the department stores basement and poorly merchandised (Downing-Peters, 2015; Kinley, 2010; Connell, 2013; Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012; Czerniawski 2015), but they also navigate through race-based assumptions about their morals, character and competence especially in professional settings based on the style, colour and fit of clothing they elect to wear as Black women and, for participants such as Nana, Amina, Lexis and Fancy, darker-skinned Black women. Fat, plus size or curvy women are routinely judged by onlookers based on the clothing they wear; more so than 'straight sized' women. Decisions to wear a bright colour or a fitted outfit displaying fat, unruly rolls unapologetically is often met with objection and even direct requests to cover up their 'abject' bodies. My participant experiences illustrate the very public considerations that go into the personal process of their wardrobe selection.

Becky's body story elaborates on the theories of decorum, fatness, race, gender and the workplace. The following quote demonstrates how she uses her clothing to help 'dress' her identity at her workplace and illustrates how clothing is paramount to how she presents herself publicly:

> It's pretty bad at work. Um…It's pretty bad at work. It's pretty bad at work [sad tone with deep breaths in between each reiteration]. I just realized that I do something that I forgot that I did that I stopped doing. I think I stopped and then I started again. I think I've told myself it's because of fashion. Um, because it does look good but I, I think it's because I'm somewhat self-conscious. Because of the constant fat talk at work, I've become more self-conscious at work. Yeah, so I keep my, I keep my little blue denim jean jacket on. It's just like a security. I feel better with my jacket on. I wear it all the time. I feel more put together with my jacket on. At times my clothing can um, I can

> forget I'm fat. I can forget I'm fat because I can look like everyone else. I look like everybody else or I can look better than everybody else according to what I'm wearing. I want the world to see me as polished.

As Becky's story continues, she explains how her attire increased in its currency the fatter she became. Her denim jacket, which she consistently wears in the office, serves as a protective shield – a visual symbol, albeit temporal, for identity and one which she can curate to some extent. Her jacket affords her the ability to literally 'cloak' her 'incompetent' corporeality. Relating this to the sociological concept of cloaking and the cloak of competence[78] (Edgerton, 1967; McLuhan et al. 2014), Becky's denim jacket literally becomes a physical manifestation of the cloak which then attempts to render her fatness invisible and more importantly protected from stigmatizing feelings and social interactions with colleagues that may render Becky discredited[79] and incompetent in a thin centric space where her fatness is read as an unwelcomed excess. Becky works in the television industry and it is often a toxic environment where she has had to manage her aesthetic identity because of the pervasive fat talk and diet culture her colleagues engage in.

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[78]Anthropologist Robert Edgerton's 1967 participant observer study of 48 mildly "mentally retarded" youth (the term used in the study and one which is currently outdated and pejorative) documented how disabled persons fought stigma by utilizing practices they felt would help them pass as "normal" and competent. Relating this to fat and disability studies and the role of social stigma both groups contend with, fat bodies are often read as disabled, un-able, and incompetent. Dressing up the fat body in clothing that may either conceal, downplay or attempt to normalize fatness by making it visible and even fashionable may be reflected upon through the concept of the cloak of competence or cloaking. The difference however is that disabled people, are not usually blamed for their disability. Fat people are routinely blamed for their fatness since fat is seen as highly mutable and something a person can change if they possess willpower, the moral 'high' ground, and a true desire to be a respected, contributing citizen in society.

[79] Goffman's (1963) concepts of discredited (known and visible stigma) and discreditable (stigmatic identities that may be unknown and can be concealable) are especially useful in a discussion on cloaking fat/ness. Fat embodiment may be discreditable to an extent however fatness remains predominantly discredited.

Furthermore, often being the only Black employee and always the only fat employee in a white and thin-dominated profession, Becky has also had to navigate through sizeist and racist micro-aggressive (Shaw, 2005, 2006; Tate, 2009, 2018) readings of her body which are routinely labelled by her colleagues as 'just jokes' in the office or on set. On one occasion Becky overheard a colleague watching a music video referring to the singer's buttocks as "gross". In the moment, Becky remembered thinking that if her colleague could insult the singer's buttocks, what would they think of hers which Becky said was easily "five times the singer's size". For Becky, who describes herself as a "slave to fashion", her clothing code in the workplace, similar to Pat's, is her attempt to benefit from the 'symbolic values and purposes of fashion as necessitated after her internalized social comparison between herself and the celebrity.

According to sociologist Fred Davis in *Fashion, Culture & Identity* (1992) fashion serves a purpose in the way in which it diffuses within and among societies, processes of social differentiation, social integration and the social-psychological needs it may satisfy for both the wearer and the looker. Fashion also 'feeds' on our identity instabilities (17) and through its multiple symbolic meanings in different spaces it can help alter people's virtual identities (Goffman, 1963) affording them the ability to highlight or downplay certain images of themselves. Dressing can be a vehicle towards the socialization, symbolism and resistance against life contradictions such as the use of clothing to mask socioeconomic status or act as an aspirational appendage and it can serve as both a means to self agency and oppression (McDermott & Pettijohn, 2011; Michelman & Kaiser, 2000; Mohamed, 2011). As not to lose the body's materiality in the seams of the clothes, bodies – the wearers – actively intervene with fashion. Putting herself together for work aids Becky in her quest to 'fit in' to her work culture by being read a certain way. She believes this has implications towards her job progress and

security[80]. As Davis states, the sociological and cultural meaning of clothing is significant. "Through clothing, people communicate some things about their persons, and at the collective level this results typically in locating them symbolically in some structured universe of status claims and life-style attachments" (4). Sartorial choices share in the work of ambivalence management similar to other self-communicative devices such as our voices, body postures, and facial expressions and the material objects we surround ourselves with (Goffman, 1959). As Becky articulates,

> I work with all skinny white people. Looking polished gives me, it gives me a leg up. At least when they look at me they don't see the fat, they see the nice clothes. They see fashion, they see style or at least I hope so? They don't see, you know, *that* [emphasis on that] Black girl and maybe I can keep my job that much longer or be remembered as the fashionable one and a hard worker, for future job opportunities.

In Monica L. Miller's *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (2009), Miller explores how Black dandies[81] have utilized fashion (i.e. clothing, hair styles and accessories) from slavery to the contemporary moment as a strategic

[80] While Becky believes her clothing selection may afford her additional job security, as the researcher I do not wish to suggest that systemic or everyday racism can be erased through fashion. Becky has defined her situation as such with very real consequences to her if she doesn't wear her jacket (i.e. ridicule, hypervisibility, discomfort, job loss).
[81] Miller's monograph *Slaves to Fashion* (2009) charts the history of black dandyism in the Atlantic Diaspora as the story of how and why Black people became arbiters of style and how they use clothing and dress to define their identity in different and changing political and cultural contexts. No longer the costumed object designed to trumpet the wealth, status and power of white [slave] master sitters, black people became self-styling subjects who use immaculate clothing, arch wit, and pointed gesture to announce their often-controversial presence. Miller uses the concept 'stylin' out' to discuss the sartorial choices of Black people -often over the top- as a performative act of resistance and resilience requiring both an actor and an audience. Dandyism is not only about clothing but about intense impression management: managing bodily demeanour, gesture and mobilizing wit to win status approval, or as an aspirational identity of freedom as also discussed in Tanisha Ford's (2015) *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style and the Global Politics of Soul* in which Ford utilized the concept of 'soul style.'

tool to help construct and perform their identities in changing political and cultural contexts. Read as symbols, sartorial choices send out signals about how each dresser perceives herself, how she wants to be perceived by others and it also can inform how the dresser sees and evaluates others too. In Kharnita Mohamed's "Refashioning the Local: Black Masculinity, Class & Clothing "(2011), Mohamed conducted a visual ethnography to follow the clothing choices and aspirations of a group of young Black boy undergraduate students from Cape Town, South Africa. Despite their lower-income, lower-middle home realities these boys, determined to create what Mohamed called 'unique style' as a means of rearticulating a more sophisticated upward social mobility masculinity, sought out luxury images, clothing choices and post-apartheid discourses of style, access and success in *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (GQ) Magazine as an attempt to reject apartheid's oppressive conflation of race and class. Clothing was also at the center of the Canadian photo series *Wanted* that was unveiled at the Art Gallery of Ontario in the fall of 2017. Artists Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, refashioned 18th century fugitive slave ads printed in Canada, which featured detailed descriptions of the attire worn by slaves who dared to chase liberation and to wear their vision of liberation through their stylish clothing as resistance. In Becky's body story, her sartorial choices are directly linked to her efforts at gaining social currency within a workplace where she struggles between complex feelings of both invisibility and hypervisibility as the fat, racialized other in her workspace. Becky's body story demonstrates how her negotiations regarding what to wear, how to present, how to occupy space, and decoding meanings behind social interactions are consistently at place. This could be read as a 'burden' of sorts – the mental energy of always internally negotiating her external presentation or it could be a form of 'enclothed activism' – her attempt at using material means to secure whatever institutional comforts such as the fleeting feeling of 'fitting in' or being well 'put together' she

can at work. Becky and other participants' strategic curation of their sartorial choices, I argue illustrates what I describe as 'fat dandyism' – a performativity of dress and style in which through fat women's 'stylin' out' they may attempt to manage their image and possibly most significantly the perceptions of others around them. As Amina mentions on fat, Black women and clothing, "Let's be real, the best way to pass in fatphobic spaces is to be well put together, groomed and all that kind of stuff…It's easier to get by and when I'm well put together, you know, uh, people say you're a big girl and you look great." Amina theorizes on the material benefits of what I refer to as 'enclothed passing' – the ability for certain self-stylized choices to afford an individual access. Fat bodies are particularly disadvantaged in terms of cultural capital (Gerber & Quinn, 2008, LeBesco, 2004). In order to *attempt* to gain capital from fashion, fat women are encouraged to spend – to be consumers. As Margitte Kristjansson explains in "Fashion's 'Forgotten Woman': How Fat Bodies Queer Fashion and Consumption," "Fat people, so the cultural logic goes, are consumers who over-consume: the material evidence of their corpulence is 'proof' of this" (2014:131). However, our so-called penchant to consume isn't celebrated in consumer culture since combined with negative stereotypes attached to fat bodies, shopping and eating are often conflated as symptoms of the same moral decay: out-of-control bodies (Kristjansson, 2014). Fat women are therefore double-bound not only as women participating in the 'frivolous feminized' (Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012) practice of shopping but as fat women destined to participate wrongly and sloppily by sheer virtue of our corpulence. As LeBesco explains not only are fat bodies threatening since they signal downward mobility but they also "provoke racial anxieties in the West because of their imagined resemblance to those of maligned ethnic and racial Others: fatness haunts as the spectre of disintegrating physical privilege" (2004: 56). Fat Black women's participation in fatshion is not only a response to

fashioning fat but it's also a material effort against ant-Black sentiment where the currency of appearance is triply critical.

Clothing, accessories and the use of style assist fat, Black bodies in both disappearing and being seen through economic subscription to various technologies of the self (Luther, Gutman et al., 1988; Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012). In her article "Race, Ethnicity and the Way We Shop," (2003) authors Rebecca Gardyn and Fetto John addresses ethno-racial shopping trends. According to her American-based research, Black people are the most fashion-conscious of all racial and ethnic groups. In fact, 34 percent of Black consumers say they like to keep up with changes in trends and fashion, compared with 28 percent of Asians, 27 percent of Hispanics and 25 percent of whites (Gardyn, 2003). A similar study conducted by Mediamark Research, Inc. (2002) found that 58 per cent of Blacks responded affirmatively to the statement "I like to dress in the latest fashions" compared to 46 per cent Asian, 46 per cent Hispanic, and 36 per cent White respondents. In Charles, Hurst and Roussanov's "Conspicuous Consumption and Race" (2009), Black and Hispanics spend larger shares of their finances on visible goods (i.e. clothing, jewelry and cars) than comparable White persons. However, this spending goes beyond trendiness and instead is more indicative to racialized persons seeking more status in public spaces where our likeability, intelligence, skill sets, and our morals are more likely to be judged on the basis of our looks or what we are wearing for example more so than our White counterparts. Black women's hair, skin colour, facial features, body shape, clothing and accessories help inform how we feel about ourselves and can also inform our life experiences (hooks, 2005). For those who are unable to access contemporary, fashionable clothing due to economic constraints or the sheer time commitment of dressing up they are not privy to the additional social and cultural currency fashionable threads often afford. Amina candidly

expressed how her inability to participate fully in the fashion marketplace due to her limited economic means has impacted her dating outcomes within the LGBT community so much so that she doesn't date much in queer communities because, due to previous dating experiences, she finds some women to be very superficial and on an unbridled quest for status based on what someone's wearing, where they live, what degrees they have or don't have. According to Amina, especially in fat activism spaces, queer women "talk the talk" they are all for fat liberation *but* they don't date the fat girl:

> If money weren't such an issue for me … it would be easier for me to dress better or to find, find number one and affordable lingerie and clothes and all that kind of stuff…I used to dress up but let me tell you especially when you're poor it takes a lot of time and energy…I mean I barely have time to finish my housework never mind going [shopping]. And I can't afford it anyway cause my rent just keeps going up and up and up…There's a status and *passability* [emphasized] that comes along with being fat and well put together in your clothes. It's easier to get by in fatphobic spaces dressed up.

To revisit briefly the significance of the Black dandy, Miller states, "When Black people use the body as cultural capital and clothing as a necessary but unstable currency of self-worth, a dandy's style reveals the value of blackness[82] in a global market of identity formation in which,

[82] The value of the Black stylized disabled body is also taken up in the work of Yinka Shonibare a British-Nigerian conceptual artist who explores cultural identity, colonialism and postcolonialism within the context of globalization. Shonibare is disabled, engages other artists to help bring his concepts physically to life and is known for incorporating brightly coloured fabrics in many of his works. Shonibare's artistic renderings, such as *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998) where Shonibare becomes the dandy to demystify and uncover Victorian history as a construct and *Alien Obsessives: Mum Dad and the Kids* (1998) often trouble the black/white binary by providing satirical, derisive critiques (Hylton, 1999).

at different times and in different places, the cost of embodying or performing blackness can be both too cheap and too dear" (Miller, 2009: 25). Further to my concept of fat dandyism and its ability to rattle and invert expected respectability dress norms for fat bodies, there are costs associated with performing fatness through consumer capitalism as I mentioned earlier. Fat people due to size-based discrimination in the workplace, make less than their thin counterparts. This itself makes the costs of fashionable clothes inaccessible to many fat bodies. Fat fashion can both prop up and exclude fat bodies. In the spirit of commodity racism, commodity lesbianism (Clark, 1991), and feminist consumerism as illustrated in the Dove Real Beauty Campaign (Johnston & Taylor, 2008), it is arguable that corporations are not necessarily shifting their beliefs or stereotypes about fat and fatness but that, due to a desire for additional capital, fat women and girls as another consumer group to 'tap,' becomes an opportunity for corporate fat consumerism. LeBesco's "Revolution on a Rack: Fatness, Fashion, and Commodification" (2004) outlines a brief but insightful trajectory on the relationship between fat women and consumer culture that raises questions about the motivations behind corporations' 'discovery' of fat women and whether or not fashion, inextricably linked to capitalism, should be lauded as a feminist site for transformative feminist activism or fat activism more specifically (LeBesco, 2004: 54-73). Amina's fears around the price of clothing and her inability to participate in the marketplace is then directly linked to her inaccessibility in the dating arena where she expresses often being judged by her outer fashion appearance. As McDermott and Pettijohn's (2011) research on the influence of clothing fashion and race on perceived socioeconomic status of college students demonstrates, lookers make personality and class judgements based on what people are wearing and when the wearer is racialized the significance of 'fancy' clothing is amplified. Lookers give more currency to the Black person in identifiably better quality or

branded clothing. Marketing scholars Daiane Scaraboto and Eileen Fischer conducted research to connect with various fatshionistas, fat consumers and fatshion bloggers to better understand the motivations that compel marginalized consumers to advocate for more 'plus size' options from mainstream markets (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012). Their research documents that the establishment of online forums enabled consumers to identify with one another, to question entrenched suppositions and practices within mainstream fashion industries, and to form an understanding of preferred practices that question the rationality of exclusionary practices enacted by mainstream marketers and retailers (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012: 18). As Becky, Nana, Pat, and others indicated, the online fashion community has been a space where they can negotiate fashion looks for fat or 'curvy' bodies regardless of if they purchase them or not.[83] Choice in clothing can communicate responsibility, status, power, and the ability to be successful (Turner-Bowker, 2001) and therefore impacts people's appraisals. As fat women who are often negotiating clothing choices without the abundance of fashionable choice afforded to 'straight' size smaller women, it is arguable that fat women navigating both fat and black-related stereotypes through sartorial choices are starting the race at a disadvantage.

My participants' memories and experiences in and of their clothing in both girl and adulthood highlight the influence clothes have on the wearer and their body stories. Clothing choices are far from mere responses to fashion magazines They are instead directly linked to our past memories of unfavorable interactions and desires for more positive outcomes. Sophie Woodward in *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (2007) explains that regardless of what is "in style" a woman's choice is more so coloured by what is "her" and by the memories, biographies,

[83] Decisions to purchase are multifaceted. Not only are fat women subjected to higher clothing costs but shipping and handling, duty fees and the inability to try clothing on prior to purchases that can include no exchange or refund clauses in the case of sale items create systemic barriers for fat women to participate in clothes shopping.

interactions and relationships forged while living in her clothes. The textures of clothing, which I discuss specifically in reference to Pat's undergarments later in this segment, also provides an affective experience that might not always be easily explained verbally but more so through the mere act of keeping an article of clothing after they've worn old or no longer fit. Clothing of the past paired with clothing of the present come together to form today's reality and possibly tomorrow's aspiration. Since "clothing represents a material visualization of memory as opposed to the intangible nature of memory" (52). This can be further analyzed through the concept of enclothed cognition.

In "Enclothed Cognition" (2012), Adam and Galinsky introduce the concept to describe the systematic impact clothes can have on the wearer's cognitive processes, which influence how people think, feel, and act as individuals and within social interactions. Beyond seeing an article of clothing, the physical experience of actually wearing the clothes, and the symbolic meanings attached to the garment, Adam and Galinsky argue, causes people to 'embody' the clothing *and* its symbolic meaning themselves, which I relate to my participants' body stories such as Pat's experience. Pat, 36, who works at a call center in a managerial position, made specific decisions around the type of clothing she'd wear to work and how these might influence people's perceptions of her as a Black, fat woman in the office. Her clothing choices provide Pat with additional visibility and credibility among her colleagues since for Pat skirts are symbolic of the version of herself as a Black woman in a leadership position she wants to project:

> Moving in this world I have to put myself together in a certain way…Not only is it visually but also through my articulation. If I can articulate myself a certain way through my clothes and my interactions, that privileges my body in particular ways, you know?

> …It helps me move through the world in a way where I can take ownership and make decisions…When I go to work I dress to impress…I do not wear pants anymore, I wear colours, very feminine styles, and I do not try to hide myself in darker colours and overly bagging clothes as I had done in the past and in childhood as a way to sort of make myself invisible." When I'm going to work I need to be good in my head and I need to be dressed in a particular way.

Enclothed cognition is useful for explaining participants such as Pat and Lexis' feelings of femininity, sexiness, attractiveness, power, visibility and glamour experienced in certain fashions they associate with these abstract concepts as opposed to the invisibility, frumpiness, asexual and in some cases defeminized projections they experienced when unable to access or afford the clothing options or alterations they needed in order to feel and be what they perceived as "put together." Clothing, for my participants, represent an opportunity for adult 'dress up' where they can literally 'try on' different aspects of their personality and their social identity. For Lexis, 34, wearing tight, well-fitted clothing she often designs herself allows her to play up feminized performance and to also queer the status quo for what fat bodies are supposed to wear (Kristjansson, 2008). It is beneficial to how she moves in her world:

> I have a hyper feminine identity and I enjoy showing off my body in tight clothing…If I'm just being functional I may not subscribe to the usual hair, makeup, outfit that sort of thing but I do feel less visible and less feminine when I operate that way as well. I enjoy fashion, it's what I went to college for and I make my own clothes to ensure they fit my measurements and accentuate my curves well…It helps to boost my confidence, it's like

> a little bit of social insurance. Being well put together should get me better treatment or better respect or like allow me to move a little bit freer but also being less performative can also allow me to move under the radar sometimes when I don't necessarily want the extra attention…it can sometimes be to your advantage sometimes to not um, be seen, um as a female threat… I like to dress up and I like to dress well, um, specifically too as a Black woman, um that allows [non-Black] people to feel more comfortable with you in a way that is like well clearly, you're not one of those trashy [emphasized] Black women. You [non-Black persons] are able to pick out signifiers that make you more comfortable like nice shoes, nice purse you know…the stuff that people realize okay she's safe because she shares some common signifiers here.

When fat women wear clothing that renders them visible in unexpected ways, when they break rules regarding "tasteful" conventions, fashion can be a tool to 'stymie fat oppression' (LeBesco, 2004: 73). Beyond the symbolic meanings attached to clothing, my participants body stories also express the real cultural currency gained as well as the currencies lost according to their attire. A fat, Black woman wearing fashionable clothing that demands a material visibility of her body is an act of resistance. Black fat women working to get their aesthetic image 'right' through attire echoes the larger project of black persons' attempts to reimage blackness – black visibility and visuality – outside of the dehumanizing historical iconicity of black bodies spectacularized as punitive. Black bodies as negative spectacle supports white superiority through the process of negative differentiation (Fleetwood, 2011:13).

It is equally important to acknowledge that, for some of my participants, as noted by Lexis and Fancy, moments of invisibility have also represented acts of resistance where they can

move "under the radar" without having their bodies policed in particularly gendered, raced and sized ways through their own sartorial choices. For Fancy, not wearing revealing or tightly fitting clothing is her resistance. It is her enclothed resistance[84] and her enclothed resilience. Although she does note that since she dresses more conservatively she isn't approached for dates, her choice to wear clothing that doesn't have to "let the whole world know she has a booty" is part of her way of "regaining accountability" for her own body and her safety. Resistance and accommodation of dominant bodily messages must be understood as a discursive spectrum of experience as opposed to binary ways of being. Discourses are social practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972: 49). Anti-fat discourse maintains thin privilege, which extends to fashion's longstanding history of devaluing fat bodies. Looking at fashion, as a form of discourse, the documenting of and discussion on my participants sartorial memories and experiences, illustrates the significance of clothing to their raced, gendered and sized body stories and social interactions. In some instances, participants reflect on cleaving to normalized body and beauty standards' calls for hiding fat as the 'unfashionable' body, in other scenarios participants speak to resistances they've exercised through their sartorial choices where they elect to wear clothing such as tight-fitting outfits, like Becky who says she will wear a mini-skirt going against the grain of 'fat wear' at work some days when she's in a 'I don't care' mood, or Pat who remembers going to a dance in a white see-through top with a bra and a pair of tights on. According to Pat, she felt desirable in that particular outfit on that particular night: "My former self would have put on a tank top underneath but this night I was like fuck it…and for some reason my stomach looked perfectly flat on that night. It wasn't but it

[84] Enclothed resistance and enclothed resilience are concepts I have created to express the embodied activism, the agency of my participants who 'talk back' through their sartorial choices against the expected norm. For Fancy, her decision not to show her body is equally powerful as others, such as Lexis, a burlesque dancer's, decision to show her body through revealing and tight-fitting attire.

felt like it was…I felt desirable and for me that meant in the most-corniest way, care-free, like I didn't care." Through self-fashioning, some of my participants are able to access their oppositional gaze (hooks, 1992) as a space of agency where they can engage in critical spectatorship as they talk and look back at fat stigma, misogynoir, class, gender and sexuality assumptions through their threads.

As Behnke argues in *The International Politics of Fashion*: *Being Fab in a Dangerous World* (2017), Butler's (1988) concept of performativity[85] and her emphasis on the performativity of identity should be amended to additionally focus on the sartorial choices of women performing their gender (Behnke, 2017: 5). While Butler does take up sartorial code in her discussion of drag and cross-dressing, according to Behnke similar attention should be paid to women's fashions. Using the metaphor of the actor, Behnke argues that any actor's performance depends largely on the costume worn in order to bring the performance to life. According to Behnke, fashion makes the performances of gender, and I would argue other subjectivities such as size, race and sexuality visible and therefore real. The complexity and the contexts of my participants' sartorial choices and their stance on the importance of their aesthetic image illustrate that both resistance and accommodation of body ideals within dress are on a continuum as opposed to a binary. Our bodies cannot be disaggregated from our world.

Through their self-fashioning, while participants speak of sometimes resisting expected fashion norms for fat bodies, participants equally 'put themselves together' so they can manage

[85] Judith Butler argues against the erroneously concretized notion of gender as a stable identity (1988, 1990). Instead Butler argues gender as an historical situation, framed and reframed through an impressionably "stylized repetition of acts" rather than as a natural, ontological way of being thought to originate exclusively from the original actor (1988:392). These acts embody, explains Butler, referencing both Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, certain cultural and historical possibilities (1988: 392-393). Without these repetitions and appropriations, situated in one's individual daily acts and practices, Butler argues, there would be no gender construct — no gender— at all.

their impressions of themselves *for* themselves and others so they may be understood and read as 'put together' fat, Black women in the workplace and other social settings. Their choices are largely informed by their histories, material conditions especially economic considerations, other intersectional social determinants that impact their social interactions such as racism and sexism, and by the interpersonal status benefits that can come from being perceived as put together by others as a 'good fat' as some of my participants referenced. Stacy Bias in the "12 Good Fatty Archetypes" (2014) describes various tropes of fatness and how these operate to maintain the social hierarchy regarding which [fat] bodies matter and which ones do not. One such good fatty archetype is that of 'The Fashionista.' Presumably heterosexual, cis-gendered, able-bodied and hour-glass shaped, she is the fat body that's 'put together.' She presents her fatness acceptably through her engagement in fatshion consumerism and capitalism. For many of my participants, the costs and benefits of the quest to be 'put together' evokes this archetype. And as one of my participants who has financial struggles confirmed, not every fat body can participate in fashion and if you cannot afford fashionable threads you are then responsible for your body not being seen as acceptable.

According to fashion and art historian James Laver, "clothes are never a frivolity. They are always an expression of the fundamental social and economic pressures of the time."[86] Fashion theorist Joanne Entwistle, in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (2015), describes dress as embodied practice and further explains that fashion serves to make the body both legible and illegible at a glance.[87] Participants engage in various clothes-switching strategies to help facilitate the (re)presentation of their bodies they deem as necessary

[86] Laver, James (1968), *Dandies*, West Sussex: Littlehampton Book Services.
[87] Entwistle, Joanne (2015), *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress & Modern Social Theory*, Cambridge: Polity.

in their given interactions. As my biracial Black & Caucasian participant Steff, 29, noted, when she had to appear in court she straightened her hair:

> …You're going into a court situation, you're going into a professional situation, you're going into a job interview, you "whitify" yourself even without thinking about it. And all of a sudden, you're speaking in, you know, a more proper tone, um using words, you know, using million-dollar words, uh, that you wouldn't normally use on a regular day-to-day basis. And that's, you know – that's part and parcel with being "professional." But it's also white-washing yourself. If you want to look at where it stems from, these academics that tell us how to behave in business settings for instance are often the white male majority. You sort of become a chameleon, especially because I'm mixed. You're able to walk both sides of it and a – it almost becomes second nature. You don't even realize that you're doing it a lot of the time, or at least I don't realize that I'm doing it a lot of the time anymore. It's just what you do to survive, right, and what you do to get by.

According to Stef, her self-fashioning choices afforded her a more normalized, 'racially ambiguous' reading of her body or what could be understood as more 'put together.' In this example, the participant was attempting to make her body more 'legible' and therefore arguably more *credible* to a predominantly white courtroom and the white judge. Equally, when Steff attends Caribana[88] playing mass with the mass camps, she pays particular attention to the stylization of her hair to ensure it's read as 'Black enough' and she's not mistaken as white. "I'm wearing braids or I'm making sure that my hair is out and curly so they can see, 'oh, she's mixed

[88] The Toronto Caribbean Carnival, formerly and still commonly called Caribana, is a festival of Caribbean culture and traditions held each summer in the city of Toronto, Ontario.

with something, right?' And then all of a sudden, I fit, and now I matter again. Otherwise I was being marginalized." The phenotypical significance of hair for Steff's racial identity in this instance demonstrates the political and cultural significance of hair as a marker of otherness and at the same time belonging.

As some theorists have written, Black woman's heritage is not so much signaled by her clothing as it is signaled by her choice of hairstyle and texture (Franklin, 2001:146). It is important to note that Steff's decision to straighten her hair isn't a sign of wanting to be white. This is too simplistic a reading of the negotiations many Black and mixed-race women must make when deciding on hairstyles[89] (hooks, 2005, Prince, 2009). Quite often the battle on the agenda is to keep one's job, or to negotiate a promotion, or to stop the harassment (Franklin, 2001:141). With an objective to survive particular social interactions, the choice to embrace so-called white aesthetics temporarily may represent an easier skin to inhabit and function within without discrimination. Feminist scholar Kathy Davis complicates cosmetic surgery in a similar fashion. Based on her research and interviews with women who have had procedures done (1995), Davis concluded that cosmetic surgery, including those to alter 'racial' or ethnic features,

[89] According to arts historian Charmaine Nelson, Black hair operates as an "over determined sign which binds us to our race and culture through its visibility and corporeality" (Nelson, 2004). Black people's hair, according to visual culture critic Kobena Mercer, has been "historically devalued as the most visible stigma of blackness, second only to skin [colour/complexion]" (Mercer, 1987: 35). Black women's hair and particularly the way it is worn, either permed or "natural," is read differently. Black women wearing straight or loosely curled permed hair are usually rated as more beautiful by Eurocentric standards. However, in terms of their assumed race politics, they are often judged as depoliticized, non-threatening and having internalized white beauty ideals (Craig, 1997). Mercer cautions against dichotomous thinking which essentialize and pigeonhole Blackness into a singular anachronistic representation. Needed are critiques that emphasize not only Black hair as a political site where race, gender and class associations are constructed, reconstructed and resisted but also as a site of creative self- expression, "an *artform"* (Mercer, 1987: 34; Craig, 1997: 402) where people can pick and mix their styles from a plethora of influences without being accused of internalized self-hate or the desire to want to imitate Whiteness (Mercer, 1987). Sociologist Althea Prince echoes this when she states that, "for some Black women hair is just hair. The choices they make are connected to convenience and ease not to their race politics or sexual preference [presumably lesbian]" (Prince, 2009: 16). Mercer and others have also challenged the concept of 'natural' by illustrating that even *'au naturel'* hair styles without perms require external interventions i.e. combing, applying hair oils, trips to the hairdressers, trims etc. and therefore are not technically 'natural' (Kelley, 1997: 346).

could be viewed as an intervention in identity – that is a person's sense of her embodied self – than as merely a beauty practice or some desire to be white. According to Davis cosmetic surgery may be a rational response to everyday and systemic oppression based on society's usual response to looks that are viewed as 'different' and not 'normal' as unsettling if not outright grotesque (2003). As Davis states on the politics of the body, "the study of embodiment involves examining the intersection of her/his[90] body as well as the cultural meanings attached to the body and body practices" (Davis, 2003: 85)[91]. Cultural studies scholar Christopher Charles (2009; 2012) uses his concept of 'complex personhood' to argue for a more expansive rationale for body modification that may initially be read by most as signs of internalized racism. In the case of skin-bleachers, Charles explains that traditional debates usually label Black bleachers as anti-Black, self-haters. Charles' argues instead that the decision to bleach can also be reimagined as a rational, well thought out response – a coping mechanism – against systemic discrimination to access the social benefits of lighter skin. Charles suggests that Blacks who bleach their skin are not inherently seeking Whiteness but instead are sophisticated, integrated, multidimensional goal-oriented people who display strengths, resilience, weaknesses, confidence, contradictions, resistance, fears and ambiguities as they go about their lives and as such social interactions.

Often times clothing choices for Black women are risky decisions where we are constantly negotiating between clothing, jewelry, make-up and hairstyles. Some of us 'buck the system' as Steff refers to her acts of embodied resistance, and others eschew any sign of

[90] Her/his and s/he gender labels subscribe to an archaic gender binary and is used here solely as a direct quote from the author's 2003 scholarship.

[91] "Ethnic cosmetic surgery evokes ambivalence…as a kind of 'surgical passing' it can be viewed as a symptom of internalized racism or traitorous complicity with oppressive norms of physical appearance but it cannot be reduced to the straightforward rejection of black or ethnic identity. The sense of unfairness at realizing what is denied to a person because of physical markers like skin colour or hair or the shape of a nose may be so overwhelming that a nose job or eyelid correction may feel like an oppositional act – a way to defy the system and get the benefits a person knows s/he deserves" (Davis, 2003: 86).

ethnicity in our choices as a means for fitting in – for surviving in the workforce. According to fashion/dress theorist Yuniya Kawamura it is common knowledge among scholars and research professionals that fashion/dress as a research topic in academia is often considered frivolous and undeserving of intellectual considerations (Kawamura, 2011). My participants' body stories and their sartorial choices demonstrate that fashion is anything but frivolous to how they (ad)dress identity, social interactions and their feelings about their bodies. Participants' clothing choices are more than a visual representation of a certain look. They also represent a way of the wearer's being and becoming in the world. Reflecting on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body in Agnes Rocamora and Anneke Smelik's *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists* (2016), Llewellyn Negrin explains that clothes "become a prosthetic extension of the body, mediating our practical interaction with the world through their incorporation into our body schemas[92]" (122).

Building on psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu's figuration of the skin ego (1989), fashion researcher Stella North's concept of "clothing-ego" captures the utility of clothing as an experiential, supplementary skin that is crucial to the foundation and function of the skin ego. It is therefore relevant to theorizing embodiment (Cavanagh & Failler et al., 2013: 9). Skin ego suggests that the body's internal and external skins envelop the ego. As such the skin, often peripheralized by the privileging of the generalized 'body,' has profound psychical and cultural effect (Anzieu, 1989). According to North, beyond what the metaphor of the '*second skin'* might imply, clothing is primary to embodied experience. To speak of skins and egos is to speak of, on, and through clothing (North, 2013: 64). Clothing, like skin, is, "both containing and expansive,

[92] "Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'body schema' provides a useful alternative to that of 'body image' as it relates to an embodied repertoire of sensory motor capacities rather than a set of purely mental constructs as implied by the concept of body image" (Negrin,2016: 121). Similar to my concept of body stories, body schema is more inclusive of the body's temporal journey, movements and interactions as opposed to a static physical or mental 'image.'

protective and projective," (North, 2013: 66) and therefore clothing matters as a frame for the spacing of experience, and a surface that enables our interrelation with the world (North, 2013: 66-67). North contends that while implicit in Anzieu's skin ego, the connection of skin, body and clothing is not explicitly made. North states, "Failing to embrace the interfacing of skin with clothing, and vice versa, we lose another dimension of our lived — spatial, superficial — skin," (North, 2013: 84). "Interfacing, of skin with clothing, body with world, allows both skin and clothing to be had more fully, and thus body and world to be likewise," (North, 2013: 84). The act of dressing embodies the moment where social expectations and personal preferences converge (Woodward, 2007). As fashion theorist Julia Twigg expresses in *Fashion & Age: Dress, The Body & Later Life* (2013), identity and dress are intimately linked and identities are in fact negotiated through sartorial choices. Clothes display, express and shape identity, imbuing it with a directly material reality. Additional to the importance of clothing's visuality is also its feel, its texture, its touch. Fashion theorists argue that while most attention is paid to the look of fashion and others' judgements of it especially the 'male gaze' and idealized bodies, not enough research explores the haptic qualities of clothing and wearer's experience (Young, 1990) – especially intimates.

Participants' undergarments were also significant to their representation of their bodies and their self-management of fat/ness especially for participants who expressed concern with their aging bodies and the fat redistribution experienced around the stomach area. These were not items necessarily seen by others but they were imperative to my participants' functioning in their world and they reported feeling more comfortable in their skin in clothing that felt good textually. According to Steff, her Spanx had been a tool to help make herself look 'better.' While

the Spanx, or for other participants the girdle, did not remove their fatness, it helped to 'tame,' smooth or otherwise shapeshift it. As Steff elaborates,

> I think that sometimes the best way, like it or not, to really change something is to learn the rules before you break them. And if the rules are you've got to still look put together, then if I have to jump into a Spanx to make an outfit look *better* [emphasized] then I will. – but you can't hide the fact that I have large hips. You can't hide the fact that I have a large chest, that I'm busty, that I've got a smaller waist, that I've still got an hourglass figure. There's just more sand in it, you know [laughs] Then… I'm going to present it to you as presentably as it can come together and then you're going to love it anyways. Because, essentially, you're not supposed to love that because it's bigger, no matter what. But let me just make sure it's presented in the best light.[93]

For Pat, her matching bra and underwear sets were significant to how she felt about herself and how she got in touch with her sensuality in her home. Pat's best friend always wore matching "bra and panty sets" as she described them. Her friend shared how this made her feel sensual but more importantly comfortable underneath her clothing. For Pat's best friend, it didn't have to do with wearing 'sexy underwear' to entice someone. She expressed it was primarily for herself.

[93] In 2018 I found this post written by Steff on Facebook where we are both mutual friends. As social media posts are public, I have shared it here to illustrate the complexity of identity and the multilayers of body being and belonging: Post Title: "Queer. Mixed. Femme." "My relationship with my identity has always been an interesting one. As bi woman, I never felt comfortable taking up space in the queer community because I was considered neither here nor there. As a mixed woman, my journey felt the much the same-too white to be black and too black to be white. As a nearly 6 foot-tall plus sized woman I never owned the term "Femme" because I felt I naturally had to gravitate towards a more tomboyish persona because of my size and athleticism. All these years later, and I've never felt so comfortable in the skin I'm in. I only wish I had accepted myself sooner [insert yellow heart emoji]." – Steff, 33.

This inspired Pat, once her income increased and she was able to afford more expensive sets, to invest in them including ones with intricate lace applique. She said,

> Now I love thongs…I'll buy a thong on my lunch break if I see one I like and I love matching sets and they are connected to me feeling comfortable in my body um yah feeling comfortable and connected. I like the different colours and the designs I can get when they fit. It felt so comfortable the way it felt on my naked body. So sure, even though I like looking pretty and it makes me feel good to know I've got something sexy underneath my clothes, I'm also about feeling comfortable as well. It feels good on my body and I feel better about myself whether I'm looking at myself in my bathroom mirror or getting ready to walk out my door.

As feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young explained using her application of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to an analysis of women's lived experience of dress, "touch encompasses not just the feel of fabric on skin but also 'an orientation to sensuality as such that includes all the senses" (1994: 204). Cultural historian Lynn Sorge-English's *Stays and Body Image in London* (2011) investigates the stay making trade during 1680 to1810. The stay, a foundation garment used initially to conceal, and then during the third quarter of the 18th century to accentuate women's, curves (Sorge-English, 2011: 205), played a vital role in establishing the visual aesthetic of clothing and women's body shape. Sorge-English demonstrates through archival research on the wearing of stays throughout women's lifecycle and their intimate relationships with their stays, that stays were the most important article of clothing to women throughout the life cycle including during pregnancy in the 18th century (Sorge-English, 2011:

9). Sorge-English's research explains how a woman's sense of respectability and public readiness were among the values people felt their stay afforded them in life. "Stays, and the production, acquisition and wearing of them, were of social significance" (Sorge-English, 2011: 198). According to Sorge-English, women of all classes, despite the quality or durability of the stay, saw acquiring and wearing one as essential to their personal and public identity construction and maintenance during this period. The stay therefore illustrates how clothes can reinforce one's social status and can influence access to perceived and real cultural capital. This echoes Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1996 [1979]) with his use of the example of dress to capture the idea of the class structuring of taste and of the related practices of distinction. He writes, "fashion is the latest fashion, the latest difference. An emblem of class (in all senses) withers once it loses its distinctive power" (Bourdieu, 1993: 135). As Kawamura explains, fashion is used to differentiate oneself from others. "It includes a group that wears a similar style and excludes others who do not dress like the group. Class inclusion and exclusion are the opposite side of the same coin," (Kawamura, 2011: 4). Entwistle's exploration of the corporeal experience of clothing, rather than solely on visual representations of the idealized body, provides an account of women's dress as 'situated bodily practice' which analyzes how it is experienced, lived and embodied by wearers (Entwistle, 2000; 2015). My participants' body stories illustrate how "our sartorial practices are modulated by the spatial and temporal context within which they take place" (Negrin, 2016: 124). Furthermore, Llewellyn Negrin explains that the decisions about what to wear and how to wear it always occur in relation to a particular situation within which individuals find themselves and cannot be understood in isolation from this. In the case of my participants, their image of themselves and the one they wish to portray in their social interactions are further materialized through their dress and the

cultural and historical ideologies that inform sartorial choices. The body has its own materiality, and it is compounded by bodily adornment.

In conclusion, my participants' desire to 'buck the system' whether by accommodating or resisting normative images and ideals of bodyhood were informed by the significance of their skin in their lives. Participant reflections, such as Lexis', demonstrate the possibility of skin, the body's largest organ, as both a signifying and signified (Hall, 1997, 2013) symbol of gendered, raced and sized subjectivity. Skin perception was crucial to the value Lexis placed on the necessity for creating self-valuation and. She saw her entire cultural history and experience wrapped up in her skin. Lexis' skin had a role, as she said, in all her social interactions and it deeply informed her perception of situations and people around her. Lexis said her career in burlesque and go-go dancing presented her with a space for "working out" the presumed otherness of her body and its societal aberrance. Fleetwood (2011:110-112) is critical of "excess flesh" performances as a performative hypervisible space that is truly liberatory for Black women however she does celebrate these enactments because they acknowledge Black women's resistances through visibility. Nash extends this in *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (2014) by arguing that Black artists can use these very sites as spaces to reflect on their injuries, to account for the history of displaying black female flesh, and to recover black female subjectivity. Lexis' clothing decisions, like my other participants, were also significant to her attempts at self-valuation and self-definition.

Clothing is a perpetual element of identity embodiment, a statement of political and social memberships and a gateway to ascribed and achieved power. Select examples of my participants' stories illustrate this. It can also be a tool for self-surveillance, bodily control and an outlet for a host of potential performances that resist against and/or accommodate normative

body ideals. Clothing functions as much more than mere cloth to cover skin and regulate nakedness (Turner, 2012). It is imbued with a plethora of socio-cultural, symbolic, and lived meanings and experiences which can help or hinder an individual's ability to engage with relative autonomy over their public presentation of self as they navigate various social settings and negotiate relations with others.

As the previous two discussion chapters illustrate, from social interactions, social forces to participants' means of accommodating and resisting normative body ideals, my participants' body stories demonstrate the complexity of identity and offer a snapshot into the lived negotiations of my participants. In the next chapter, the dissertation conclusion, I review the overall aims of the project, I reflect on the research process, its triumphs and challenges and I signal to where and how this study can positively benefit the lives of women and girls - especially Black women and girls moving forward. For my final words, I end as how I started – with a personal body story of my own.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In conclusion, my qualitative study *"Put Together": Black Women's Body Stories in Toronto, (Ad)dressing Identity and the Threads That Bind*, documents the body stories of seven Black women of diverse sexual orientation and economic backgrounds among other subjectivities living in Toronto who identify as Black and fat or related euphemisms. My research is particularly necessary because it addresses Black women's bodies solely and not in comparison, as previous research has, with white women's bodies which often concluded that Black women were culturally 'immune' to body disturbances and even eating disorders. (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Duke, 2000; Gentles & Harrison, 2006). Lovejoy (2001) proposed that differences in body issues of Black and white women could be explained by three sociocultural observations a) Black women have more positive valuations of their bodies because they embrace a different beauty aesthetic, b) Black women are less likely to be motivated by the thinness ideal than white women due to differences in cultural constructions of femininity in their racial communities, and c) Black women's resistance to the thin ideal may be a defensive mechanism to deny tendencies toward what Lovejoy says was Black women's 'overeating' and 'obesity,' which she said were reflective of larger issues of problematic coping mechanism in response to multiple oppressions (Lovejoy, 2001; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014). As the literature expanded, so did a shift away from quantitative methods which centralized the issue of thinness, to qualitative investigations which explored various body issues and the social factors that inform them, research began to document fewer differences which demonstrated that Black women did have body issues – albeit not only about thinness but they were very aware of the thin

ideal. Contrary to popular belief [94], Black women do have plenty to say about their bodies (Byrd & Solomon, 2005; Capodilupo and Kim, 2014; Hesse-Biber, Livingston, Ramirez et al., 2010; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Poran, 2006) and they have actively, as my project demonstrates, negotiated with dominant body ideals and these ideals can affect their self-esteem and behaviour. Their body stories are inextricably linked to their social lives, interactions and objects of significance. This project not only provides insight into their 'personal' lives but also to the socio-cultural forces operating around them and their responses to these forces. This project centres their stories within the literature on women and girls' body image. Accordingly, my research situates often excluded Black bodies, their lived experience, accommodations and resistances against body oppression as its point of departure.

As suggested by Bristow in Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson's *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought* (1999), given the neglect of women of colour in feminist historiography, work which demonstrates women of colour challenging racial, gender and class oppressions in Canada is necessary. According to Bristow, "the exclusion of women of colour from the pages of mainstream and feminist Canadian history reflects the process by which racism is denied, the process by which a past is hidden (1994: 3). It is critical for future research to continue investigating the correlation between structures of power such as schools, workplaces, the fashion industry and popular culture, all of which my participants discussed, how

[94] bell hooks' *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (2005) makes inaccurate assumptions about Black women, fatness and community perceptions of weight. Not only does hooks situate fatness solely in food addiction, which also continues to be a myth perpetuated in today's 'obesity rhetoric' and scholarship, but she suggests that being "obese…overweight does not carry the stigma of unattractiveness, or sexual undesirability, that is the norm of white society" (52). This is not the reality for my seven participants. Although this is an older publication it is important to note that these assumptions continue to invade body image and eating disorder research today to the disadvantage of many Black women and girls who do struggle with body image and eating problems (Armstrong, 2009). While disordered eating was not a central theme for my participants, three participants discussed moments where they've weighed the benefits of dieting, food restrictions and 'starving themselves' for a short period of time as Becky reflected on her teenaged self.

marginalized groups and bodies are seen or not seen, and its impact on people's capacity to be self-determining. For my participants, issues with invisibility and hypervisibility were integral to many of their body stories. As Stuart Hall argues, 'how we "see" ourselves and our social relations matters, because it enters into and informs our actions and practices" (2000: 272). Fatness and Blackness, separately and dually augmented, are political and material disruptions of dominant 'normalized' body ideals of whiteness and thinness. My participants' stories, further evidenced by their varying social interactions from childhood to adulthood, expose the way in which their bodies have often been read as undesirable excess. Socially constructed as deviant bodies in need of self, social and systemic repair, reprimanding and refashioning, participants' accommodative and resistive strategies against idealized body norms are necessarily documented within this study as testaments to these women's identity negotiations while mitigating against the social forces and traumas often visited upon transgressive 'bodies out of bounds' (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001) – especially Black (Fleetwood, 2011; Mowatt, French et. al, 2013; Nelson, 2004; 2010; Sullivan, 2013; Tate, 2007, 2018) and otherwise racialized persons' bodies.

Through unstructured qualitative interviews, participants identify their sartorial choices, workplace dynamics, participation in certain online and offline community engagements and their connections with significant others past and present such as childhood friends, adult peers, colleagues, family members, intimate partners, and the cultural significance of their physical skin for the majority of participants as key factors informing how they feel about and relate to their bodies. Social and systemic racism, sexism, economic barriers, gender-based violence and everyday spillages of traumas such as appearance and body-based discrimination and harassment also factor into my participants' body stories. The significant and generalized threads that bind, are uncovered through their interviews. Participant memories are recalled and their clothing, as

material archives of experience and societal curriculums learned throughout their lifetime through their social interactions, emerge as imperative to how my participants 'put themselves together' for themselves and their publics. To my participants, their choices of self representation and self-definition are deliberate responses to the often undervaluing of their Black, fat bodies.

Black feminized bodies and fat bodies have historically been considered grotesque, animalistic and unnatural (Carroll, 2000; Gilman, 1985; Rocamora & Smelik; 2016; Tate, 2007; 2018) and as such my research humanizes Black women's lived experience while also sharing the strategies of resilience participants discuss as their methods of reclaiming their bodies. I capture the fluidity and contradiction of bodies as inextricably linked to the social (Shilling, 2003; 2012; Fraser & Greco, 2008; Coleman, 2008). The primary purpose of this research has been to write Black women's experiences and reflections of their bodies in relation to their social and material worlds into the existing literature on women's body image especially literature on fat embodiment and Black girls and women's lives where their body stories are largely excluded or only marginally included.

My research is informed by a hybrid theoretical framework or what I refer to as a theoretical bricolage. The project is influenced by fat studies scholarship, critical feminist standpoint theories - anti-racist, Black feminist thought, social constructionism as it relates to symbolic interactionism and fashion studies. These frameworks prioritize the importance of lived experience, social interactions and the influence of social and material objects to everyday life as integral to my participants' body stories and their body becoming journeys. While the qualitative interviews were unstructured, the following research questions helped to inform the body conversations and stories of my participants:

How do social interactions help inform fat, Black women's identity construction? What meanings and lessons are taken from these social interactions and how do they influence fat, Black women's everyday life experiences? How might fat and Black embodiment for a small group of cisgender women influence their ability to access embodied currency? How do self-identified fat Black women both accommodate and resist normalized body ideals? How might their 'putting themselves together' (i.e. sartorially 'well put together') through certain practices be strategic moves towards fitting in or disobediently *out* of particular settings?[95]

Research Implications: We Will Be Seen & Heard

My research seeks to reframe fatness and blackness and the narratives of my participants as a significant and necessary feminist subject of inquiry. Most often, biomedical, popular and academic discourse on fat embodiment does not include the voices, the standpoints of actual fat people. Fat women are often written about as pathologized "obesity" statistics and are often subject to fat oppression and weight discrimination even within 'expert' research on their fat bodies (Bacon, 2010; Bacon & Aphramor, 2014; Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Cooper 1998; Lebesco, 2004; Mayer & Schoenfielder et al., 1995; McPhail, 2017; Pause, 2012, 2015). Most scholarship on Black women's bodies, similar to fat studies (Cooper, 2012; 2016) is situated within the United States. Scholarship on Black women's bodies is primarily informed by Black feminist thought (Collins, 1991). Research on Black women's 'obesity' is usually rooted in healthist anti-fat research about their sick, diabetic, impoverished bodies draining the system.

[95] Three general probes were utilized throughout the interview as areas of exploration to help focus participant narratives and reflections on their 1) life histories, 2) contemporary experiences, social interactions and objects of significance in regards to this research topic as Black women who self-identify as fat or other euphemisms for fat, and their 3) reflections on and meaning making of these experiences and their influence on how the participants view their bodies and any subsequent interactions (i.e. dating, making friends, schooling, the workplace), self-fashioning (i.e. dress), and community memberships/ activisms (online or in-person) they engage in based on those reflections.

Situating my research on Black women living in Toronto adds to current fat studies, Black, anti-racist feminist literature on women's corporeal and lived experience and demands them be "seen and heard."

Most research suggests that Black women are culturally immune from the same negative feelings expressed by white women about fatness. My research demonstrates that this simply is not the case for the majority of my participants. The Black fat women interviewed have complicated, nuanced relationships with their bodies and while positive representation of other Black fat bodies such as those on fatshion blogs, popular culture, social media and in activism spaces may alleviate some of the feelings of discomfort, merely "being Black" does not remove Black women from the tyranny of dominant body image ideals nor the consequences felt by those who do not embody these ideals. In fact, this argument is misleading because it suggests that race, which has been well documented as a social construct, is in fact a scientific entity that magically shores up superhero powers for Black women. This treads dangerously close to racist, essentializing stereotypes such as the strong Black woman which my research addresses based on the stories of my participants.

Research Limitations: The Question of Research Size

Every research project has its limitations. From the subjectivity of the researcher and research(er) bias to structural elements of a study such as its theoretical, methodological or numerical significance. In the case of my work, the size of the qualitative study is a 'limitation' in that it cannot be used to make significant generalizations about Black women's bodies, their social interactions and strategies for self-determination. However, through their body story interviews, themes identified through my participants' interviews can be used as the groundwork

for future reflection on those themes with larger participant groups. I have also wondered how the research could have been additionally textured if I had tracked the body stories of my participants over the course of the research project – a longitudinal study. This could have been achieved either through a second and third qualitative interview spread equally over the course of the research project or through a participant annual survey with both 'mixed method' options numerical and qualitative questions. As I am connected to some participants through social media, body activisms and geographically as a Toronto resident, I have had opportunities to see their body stories continue to 'unfold' beyond our initial interviews. Some participants have been very vocal on social media and others have had shifts in their ideologies. For example, where once the word fat would never have been uttered as they expressed in their interview, they now use the word fat. Some participants have left Toronto and are now living continents away. How might their body stories have shifted in response to their change of dwelling? Or has it? To be able to interview participants on the shifting of their language for instance, or their shifting careers, intimate relationships or clothing considerations over the past three years would be an intriguing addition to the research.

Embodied Research: Participant & Researcher Reflexivity

Listening to my participants share their body stories was an honour. At first, I feared there might be a certain level of participant caution in divulging memories and experiences. Even though each participant was fully aware of the scope of the project and signed the participant consent form, I assumed the actual interview – speaking and remembering their childhood and adult bodies – might lend a certain 'realness' to the process they hadn't entirely expected and with that some potential reservations. I was wrong. Participants openly shared with me and while

the project does not have the capacity to capture the entire 'body' of their experiences, what they have shared they have done so generously. It was I, the researcher, who experienced anxious feelings of 'imposter syndrome' as to whether or not I'd do the stories 'justice'. I learned to set those ambitions aside and to simply listen and engage with my participants, recognizing that this project was not aimed at capturing whole lives. As I heard their stories unfold, my own body stories often came to the fore as I listened and observed the similarities of many of our shared experiences and certain stark differences. The gravity of certain stories – especially those marred with memories of sexual and systemic violence – reminded me of my responsibility as researcher to create as safe and as accountable an environment I could for the duration of our time together. This meant listening attentively, asking clarification questions where necessarily but most importantly it meant 'reading' the interview moment and observing their body language to offer breaks, additional snacks or a sigh or smile to appropriately validate their offerings.

In my methodology chapter I introduced the idea of 'embodied methodology' (Inckle, 2010). Throughout much of the process, I had an air boot due to a leg injury – one of a few health ailments. My mobility was compromised, my pain at times intolerable. As such, my body was deeply present in my interviews and I knew how I entered the space of the interview would set the tone for my participants. While the focus of my dissertation was on interviewing, listening to and thematically reviewing participants' body stories, I intended to try my best as a researcher to be observant of my participants' bodies, their posture, their laughs, sighs or frowns during the interview as I felt these unspoken body idioms also contributed to their spoken body stories. I wanted to 'bring the body back in' (Frank, 1990) so to speak. Pat, who mentioned being disappointed when the interview was over since she likened it to a "great therapy session", engaged in the interview with her feet comfortably resting on the couch her back propped up by

pillows and her arms resting on the back of the couch. Nana and I sat at her kitchen table where she animatingly used her arms expanding them widely at times as we enjoyed snacks and cleaned up the space during the interview. I got to *see* the confidence in motion she discussed through her body stories. I could envision Nana walking into the room of her financial peers and 'owning it' as she discussed previously. I saw Becky's frustration, her head shaking, her deep sighs when she adamantly discussed the differential treatment between Black and white fatshion (or plus fashion) bloggers in the industry. In interviewing Fancy, I noted her crossed arms embodying the defiance she spoke of when she explained why it is easier to talk about other people's bodies than her own and how her experiences with sexual violence have shaped her clothing choices and how she engaged with social media. Steff's voice was loud and piercing, it embodied a lifetime of 'bucking the system' as she stated proudly. Her gaze remained squarely in my eyes throughout the interview even as she discussed her rape, her attempts at suicide and as she disclosed her mother's passing. Although our interview took place in a library, we sat in close proximity to one another and her energy was undoubtedly magnetic.

I saw Lexis' eyes appear to yearn and she recounted that her mother never told her she was beautiful and she lit up as she remembered the dozens of pictures her father would take of her as "daddy's girl." I observed her caution as she disclosed her participation in sex work and what I interpreted as potential slight moments of pause where she might have been gauging my reaction. I also never forgot her full laugh. Amina and I laughed till our stomach's hurt during our interview and the laughter at times seemed to be the only alternative to tears as she shared heart-wrenching memories of being body policed by parents, leading to her running away and taking on an orphan identity she maintains today. In fact, laughter was a device used in most of the interviews – both as a way of demonstrating a solidarity possibly, a sort of familiarity or

relief that such a project was being made into existence but also as a form of resistance – a laugh that almost seemed to communicate an air of opposition reminiscent to Maya Angelou's revolutionary poem *And Still I Rise* (Angelou, 1978). My participants' *bodies* spoke in these interviews and in those non-verbal or unintelligible moments might lay future contributions to embodied knowing, experience and practice waiting to be unpacked.

According to Chadwick (2017), "despite a large body of qualitative research in the social sciences which has explored various aspects of bodily life and embodied experience, 'the body' usually features in such work simply as an inert object which research subjects talk about" (55). Hence hers and other scholars' call for 'fleshier research' (56). While the primary focus of my dissertation was on my participants' *spoken* stories about their bodies, this project will help to inform future corporeal research. My general awareness of my participants' physical, moving, felt bodies and their visceral, affective 'bodily energies' as well as mine as researcher (Chadwick, 2017: 60) in the space of our interview was an initial move towards my next steps for this project.[96]

Recommendations for Future Work

My participants' body stories signal the mental health implications of what I referred to as the necessary 'triple consciousness' of race, gender and size in their lives. After listening to their stories which were often riddled with concern: the emotional labour – of having to carefully curate their outer appearance in an attempt to negotiate space more safely, research into the economic costs associated with 'good' performances of blackness and fatness by Black girls and women such as hair preparation, clothing, shoes and undergarments among other accessories and

[96] That my attempts were only emergent is a limitation of the study. It represents an area of future research inspired by my current project.

aspects of the beauty economy, could be utilized to help substantiate the argument for a connection between race, size and more generally body-based discrimination and economic disparities. Specifically, I suggest research on Toronto-based Black women and girls' economic investment in the 'beauty industrial complex' as a coping mechanism - far from just a response to fashion trends - against everyday and systemic oppression and the impact of these investments on their economic health. I am interested in future participants' body languages as they engage in spaces, during real time, that are both inclusive or exclusive of their bodies. I remember observing a woman's body literally deflate – her shoulders dropped and she swung back her head and uttered the sound "ugh" – at a local clothing store when the salesclerk stated they didn't have her size. It appeared, through her actions, this was not an unfamiliar experience for her. It is one thing to speak this experience, but I am also interested in how it feels, how long those feelings linger and how they are *felt* in other aspects of people's lives. The body holds memories and what are the embodied consequences? Additionally, for fat girls and women who must often pay substantially more for their clothing with lesser quality than straight-sized bodies, the economic costs of 'keeping up with the jones' in the office, the classroom or among their peer group may be significantly more compared to the limitless styles and various price points available to normalized bodies. Exploring the consequences of sizeism, racism and sexism therefore moves beyond the experience of the individual but also considers the consumer marketplace as a space where exclusionary practices help to perpetuate the social construction of 'disobedient' bodies or bodies as my participants remembered from childhood that didn't always 'fit in.'

My participants, reflecting on their body experiences as young tweens and teenagers, spoke to the significance of 'seeing themselves' in the 1990s through popular representations of blackness in R&B and hip-hop music videos and other mediums such as television, film and

magazines. Although some participants expressed concern with stereotypical imagery of Black women at times as 'video hoes' or as aggressive, over sexualized or only as the 'best friend' and never the lead, participants also noted the 'positive' elements of some 1990s representation which helped to signal the "coolness" of Black. This "cool time to be Black," as they expressed it, aided participants while negotiating their physical aesthetic and making friends in elementary and secondary school. Dressing like their favourite music artists presented another opportunity for them to negotiate identity therefore solidifying clothing and the act of dressing as both embodied social practice (Entwistle, 2000) – a social act where both significant and generalized others converge [and influence decisions] in their wardrobes/closets.

Once the outsider in some cases, the emergence of the mainstream 'urban scene' impacted how my participants felt about their bodies as acceptable or not and made some of them feel like 'insiders' amongst their school peers for the first time. In one case this 'cool factor' helped my biracial participant Steff embrace her Black identity - what she previously saw as something she might be bullied because of, as a new strength she could tap into and disclose to her friends. That said, the common thread with participants was their disappointment in that most of these 'cool images' of Blackness were American and rarely ever Canadian at least that they could remember. One participant did mention Tonya Lee Williams, a Black Canadian actress known best for her role as Dr. Olivia Hastings on the soap opera *The Young & The Restless*, who debuted as the co-host of the Canadian children's show *The Polka Dot Door* (1980). Analyzing the impact of Toronto or Canada-based Black girl and women celebrities and other professional figures of excellence on local school-aged Black girls would be a worthwhile project to delineate the correlation, if any, between the geographic location or origin of role models and their impact on the viewer's self image, how they present themselves and their

overall impression of their size, gender and race. To explore Black girls' identification with Canadian role-models as opposed to the inundation of African-American icons. For example, revered award-winning Canadian singer-songwriter Jully Black and Canadian television journalist Tracy Moore are Black women celebrities who have received public criticism on their body size and muscularity, their height and hair stylization for instance. I am curious as to how Black girls today respond to seeing beautiful, strong and talented Canada-based women such as these two and how this may impact their body stories today and tomorrow.

Some participants shared childhood memories of being the sole or one of a few Black families or students in their neighbourhoods and schools surrounded otherwise by White families. Participants such as Lexis spoke to the experience of not quite fitting in to her peers' version of Blackness because she subscribed more to what her Black peers thought of as a white aesthetic – goth dressing accompanied by her love of rock and other 'alternative' musical genres. Based on the participants' childhood experiences in schools where they largely felt underrepresented, invisible and at times hyper-visible, future research on Black children in the minority at their schools such as Black students attending local affluent private schools, students in more rural locations or those being bused into school from different neighbours from the ones they live in may be relevant to learning more about friend dynamics, the politics of representation and the benefit of 'seeing oneself' through peers for Black girls of all hues and sizes.

The present research prioritized the body stories of Black cisgender women who primarily subscribe to feminized clothing choices. Slight exceptions included Becky who described a short period of "dressing like a boy…masculine in oversized button-down shirts" when she was depressed because she had to leave home after being outed and therefore had limited finances

unable to splurge on clothing she preferred and Steff who described that she sometimes enjoyed playing up "masculine" and "feminine" sides with her wardrobe. Pat decided not to wear pants in hopes to increase her "feminine visibility" in the workplace as she often felt invisible in darker clothes and pants. Theorizing on 'feminine' embodiment, Sandra Lee Bartky's *Femininity and Domination…* (1990) describes three categories of disciplinary practices which she argues aim to construct a body that in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine: those that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration; those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures and movements; and those directed towards the display of this body as an ornamented surface (65).

Future qualitative research on black and fat embodiment must also consider the lived experience and fashion politics of fat and otherwise framed masculine of center women, stems[97], trans Black women and gender non-conforming Black peoples to explore the role of clothing and dress practices not only to their identity construction but as a material buffer – real or perceived – against gender-based discrimination or harassment. This research could also extend to a comparative analysis of experience among diverse groups of women of colour. My concept of fat dandyism may be useful in exploring such research. As Negrin states, "Rather than regarding it [clothing] as a disembodied form, it can more properly be seen as a second skin, which is inseparable from us. When we act in the world, we do not act just as bodies, but as *clothed* bodies, in which our attire becomes an integral part of our corporeal schema influencing ways in which we comport ourselves in space" (Negrin, 2016: 130).

[97] A colloquial 'urban' term used to describe a queer woman, who embraces stud and femme behaviours and/or aesthetic choices i.e. will wear makeup, high heels but may also wear men's suits and men's shoes. My concept of 'clothes-meshing' illustrates this idea of taking from more than one enclothed body of knowledge to dress oneself in a blended image that best suits the person's self.

I am taking this research into my equity education and activist work regarding body, size and appearance-based discrimination. Through my interviews, my participants reflected on their body stories in both Black girl and womanhood. While the dissertation's goal was not to document all their stories, it will help support my work on contemporary Black girls' body image and how they negotiate their corporeality within school and other public settings. As I discussed previously, there is often an adultification of Black girls where Black girls are just not as 'allowed' to be children as their white counterparts. Against the backdrop of systemic racism, sexism, weight and shadeism being tackled in schools[98], I am interested in comparing experiences my participants shared when they were Black girls with those of young Black girls today in an attempt to document the different and similar variables impacting their body experience. This dovetails with my earlier discussion on future research with Black girls, image and representation.

Through Body Confidence Canada's national campaign #SizeismSUCKS, I have met with several politicians and community leaders who see the efficacy in creating workspaces where employees – especially those with bodies perceived as marginal – can work freely without the fear of body-based harassment and exclusion. However, as it stands discrimination against fat bodies is sanctioned. The fat, Black, feminized employee's outfit options can make all the difference between their hiring or even a promotion. Without accessibility in the consumer marketplace fat bodies are especially disadvantaged and cannot cash in as readily on the social currency of fashionable, contemporary clothing.

It is crucial that body-based harassment also be placed within the intersectional context of current legislative efforts pertaining to anti-Black racism. In 2016, the Ontario government's

[98] https://www.scribd.com/document/345860428/Body-Confidence-Awareness-Week

Anti-Racism Directorate[99] was established and in 2017 the *Anti-Racism Act, 2017* was passed. However, for instance in Becky's workplace – television – where there are no current industry unions or formal employee complaint processes, it is very difficult to 'complain' in a non-unionized environment without being vilified and possibly fired for not being able to "take a joke" such as the one she was dealt when she was called Medea on set (and laughed at). As I mentioned previously, Medea is a fictional character played by African-American director/actor Tyler Perry in both drag and the controversial fat suit. Furthermore, the superfat character is stereotypically loud, aggressive, dominating, physically violent, asexual and is meant to satirically symbolize a Black family matriarch. She is also meant to provide comic relief to her audiences at the expense of her body's blackness and fatness.

My research supports my current advocacy and provides evidence as to the emotional, mental health impact my participants experienced at the hands of discrimination. This research provides a rationale for an intersectional understanding of anti-Black racism, fat phobia, misogyny, mental health and wellness. Especially with the current emphasis on gender-based violence and the introduction of the 2017 Canadian Government's *It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence*[100] it is crucial, as I said to The Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Status of Women at a local event on the day of the unveiling, the policy must consider including body and appearance-based discrimination as a form of gender-based violence. According to the strategy's initial communications, "GBV is linked to sexist attitudes and behaviours. It is made worse by other forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and biphobia." My dissertation research along with my community activism documents several body stories of women and girls that corroborate the

[99] https://www.ontario.ca/page/anti-racism-directorate
[100] http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/violence/strategy-strategie/index-en.html

need for body-based discrimination based on size and other forms of 'lookism' which are gendered experiences often more so impacting women, girls and feminized bodies to be taken seriously and considered within and when creating policy. The impact of sizeism for instance is not only emotional. The impact of fat phobia is also economic and preventing economic and social barriers for women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, queer and gender non-conforming people among others is at the heart of the strategy.

My research will also be used as a foundation to build a larger writing project where Black and other racialized women and girls will be invited to submit stories on the importance of self-fashioning practices, dress and representation politics to their everyday lives. I am eager to expand the pool of participants beyond my dissertation and I am also open to exploring how else this work may materialize beyond the page such as performance ethnography. The question asked by embodied research is, "what can bodies do?" (Spatz, 2015; 2017: 5). In the future I plan to engage in sartorial wardrobe interviews for an intimate ethnography of clothing choices (Woodward, 2007) where I can be present with participants as they negotiate their clothing choices within their wardrobes or at stores to learn of their embodied reactions to the successes and limitations of clothing and the memories, hopes, significant and generalized others who inform their choices. Participants shared body stories in relation to their dress choices but to see these dress choices being made and negotiated in real time will add a deeper, more personal element to my next phase of research. In the fall of 2018, alongside my political and fashion educator aspirations, I am scheduled to begin the formal creation of *Fat in the City: Monologues of Corpulent Proportions (aka the FAT Monologues)* with Studio 180. I opened my dissertation with an excerpt from my childhood body story shared during the Studio 180 'In Development'

Program[101] (Nov, 2015). While the name of the project may change, the emphasis on the body – on marginalized bodies of 'excess' that often dare to take up space unapologetically – remains intact.

Performance ethnography places research and text stories 'in action' and provides more accessible access to communities that may benefit directly from the research. The benefit of performance for this research is not only to present 'research' on the fat or Black body but to make the body, already a 'site' of research, sighted: visible, seen, moving and talking, 'three dimensional' (Fusco, 2008: 160), and living beyond the traditional page further making fat and Black bodies visible on our own terms. According to Fusco, when interview, communication, research and the messy materiality of bodies are reduced to textual representations alone, the body's corporeality, its materiality encountered in social spaces, is often invisible in research products because it cannot be easily rendered (Fusco, 2008). Participants Lexis, a burlesque dancer and Steff's participation at Pride or Caribana are specific examples of my participants' bodies coming to life, their defiance of so-called body, dress and movement expectations documented in living colour outside of the traditional interview. Performance ethnography provides opportunities for public reflexive insight into the cultural experiences and standpoints being presented (Goldstein, 2008: 85) and therefore may enable a transformative critique of values, attitudes and practices (Denzin, 1997; 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Saldana, 2011). In this final section I end the dissertation as I began it: with a personal body story.

[101] http://studio180theatre.com/productions/studio-180-in-development/2015-2/

Resituating Me: Final Words

In the early fall of 2016 I received emergency surgery for a high-grade bowel obstruction – my third one since childhood and the second one requiring long-term hospitalization and surgery. On the day of my surgery my surgeon told me I was "obese" and cautioned that because of my fat stomach, infection was immanent. I asked her if thin people ever got infected – she reiterated my size. I asked her about various less intrusive treatment and surgical methods…again she reminded me of my weight and told me she had 19 years of experience so she knew best. In the moment I pondered, "what about the 30 plus years of experience I'd had in and with my own body?" Did this not matter? I wondered had I not worn black 'trashy' track pants, my home shirt and my ratty sweater in our rush to the hospital if maybe my treatment might have been different at the onset. Or maybe I should have mentioned my doctoral candidacy? In the surgical suite as we waited for my late anesthesiologist, the surgeon and members of her team proceeded to talk about their "lazy" obese pets. I stated, as I laid conscious and fat on the surgical table with my stomach exposed feeling in pain but 'okay' thanks to the ER morphine drip, that my own cat had been labelled "obese" by my vet. I told them I had a 'health at every size' cat who was anything but lazy. They didn't get it. They looked at me as though I spoke gibberish. The day of my discharge my surgeon 'discovered' my incision was infected. She proceeded to use a pair of surgical scissors she pulled from her white coat – not from a sterilized tray or water solution – and partially opened my wound without any anesthesia. She claimed opening was necessary to aid the healing process. I screamed. I screamed. I screamed. She looked at me and said, "it doesn't hurt that much." I was in

shock and she continued. I continued to scream then I stopped and my tears simply ran from my right eye to the side of my cheek then into my ears. Then I was discharged.

Today, I continue to live with both emotional and physical side effects from this encounter. I plan my outfits too intensively for every medical appointment and if I'm in a rush and can't be well 'put together', I at least ensure I've got a book in hand – something to give an air of sophistication. For the purpose of this dissertation, I found myself reflecting on the surgeon's response, "it doesn't hurt that much." I related this to the violences, from physical and sexual to systemic and everyday racist, sexist and fat phobic microaggressions, that several of my participants expressed. In each of my participant's body stories, through all the laughs and the sighs, laid a subtle, unspoken knowledge, a learned lesson of the disparate place of Black women and our corporeality. No matter how well Black bodies are 'put together' stylized, educated, coifed this does not provide immunity from discrimination. My participants verified this. I saw it in our stares one on one in the interviews and in the moments where we just sat silent shaking our heads for a moment. I related my hospital experience to the ignorance of people who refuse to see the pain of intersectional body-based discrimination. To the people who think "it's just a joke."

Hoffman and Trawalter et. al (2016) describe how racial bias in the medical treatment of African American people often results in Black bodies receiving less pain medication, their pain concerns are more likely to be ignored and they are often denied the gamut of treatment options – including less intrusive options because of racist assumptions pertaining to their pain threshold relative to white people. The assumption of a biological difference is at the heart of this (2016). Similar research indicated differential treatment between people labelled as "obese" and

those who are perceived as thin or at “healthy” weights where fat people were more likely to be judged as immoral, blamed for their weight and less likely to receive necessary care (Lee & Pausé, 2016). I relate these findings back to the adultification of Black girls mentioned earlier and the redemptive second chances they are often not given in schools for instance relative to their non-racialized peers for the same undesirable behaviours. I relate this to the way in which an outfit worn by a Black teenager vs. a white teenager may be criminalized or sexualized differently. I also made correlations between the fat body which is often seen as being able to take ‘more’ because of its size as though size dissolves affect or buffers trauma. This research was my attempt to place our voices, our experiences and to some extent our physical, dressed bodies into view and to humanize our body stories – seven participants from Toronto – because despite the resilience, humour, accommodation and resistance demonstrated by my participants and myself as a Black fat woman, when our humanity is ignored, questioned or trivialized it can and does hurt that much.

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