THE IMPACT OF THE BODY POSITIVITY MOVEMENT ON THE SELF-IMAGE OF BLACK, YOUNG FAT WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

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ABSTRACT

Differences that don't fit the norm, such as race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and body type create susceptibility to marginalisation. Individuals, specifically women, who exist in larger bodies experience marginalisation which perpetuates a weight-based stigma against them. The aim of this research study was to explore the experiences young, Black, fat South African women have with the Body Positivity Movement's attempt to humanise this aspect of their identities. The literature review undertaken thus far suggests that Eurocentric and Western beauty and health ideals have a great influence on the ideals held by women of colour, especially African women in particular. The emergence of the Body Positivity Movement which brought along with it, respect, acceptance, appreciation and visibility of the unconventional body types seem to have empowered a lot of women, especially fat women. The increasing visibility and overt self-presentation of fat South African women on social media platforms illustrates the complex and often contradictory interplay between historically entrenched Eurocentric beauty ideals and the lived bodily experiences of Black South African women. This expression of corporeality in digital spaces serves not only as evidence of the pervasive influence of Western aesthetic standards that have long privileged thinness, complexion, and body proportions aligned with Euro-American norms—but also highlights the ways in which these women negotiate, resist, and reconfigure such ideals in their everyday practices of self-representation. Their active participation in online visual cultures suggests a shifting relationship to self-image, wherein the internalisation of Eurocentric beauty hierarchies coexists with emerging forms of self-affirmation catalysed in part by the body positivity movement. The research design was that of an exploratory qualitative nature and was conducted from a social constructionist paradigm with Black Feminist Thought and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology as the guiding frameworks. The sample consisted of nine participants who were recruited through purposive and volunteer sampling. Data was collected through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to explore the experiences and views of Black, fat South African women with the body positivity movement. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse the data and the results suggest that the Body Positivity Movement's impact extends beyond a change in attitude to fundamental shifts in embodied experience, cultural belonging and the phenomenological structure of self- perception among Black, fat South African women.

Keywords: Body Positivity Movement, Body Image, Self-image, Fat

Kakaretso

Diphapang tse sa dumellaneng le tlwaelo, jwalo ka morabe, ditumelo tsa bodumedi, tshekamelo ya ho kopanela diphate le mofuta wa mmele di etsa hore ho be le monyetla wa ho kgeswa. Batho ka bomong, haholo-holo basadi, ba phelang ka mmele e meholwanyane ba na le ho kgeswa, e leng se etsang hore ba be le sekgobo se thehilweng ho boima ba mmele kgahlanong le bona. Sepheo sa thutopatlisiso e e ne e le ho sekaseka tseo basadi, ba batsho ba Afrika Borwa ba nang le maiteko ona a Movemente wa Kananelo le Kamohelo ya Mmele ka ho fapana a ho etsa hore karolo eno ya boitshupo ba bona e be le botho. Tlhahlobo ya tse ngotsweng e entseng e fana ka maikutlo a hore botle le bophelo bo botle ba Bophirima ba Eurocentric le Bophirima di na le tshusumetso e kgolo mehopolong ya basadi ba mebala, haholo-holo basadi ba Afrika. Ho hlaha ha Movemente wa Kananelo le Kamohelo ya Mmele ka ho fapana ha ona e ileng ya tlisa hammoho le yona, tlhompho, ho amohelwa, kananelo le ponahalo ya mefuta e sa tlwaelehang ya mmele ho bonahala e matlafaditse basadi ba bangata, haholo-holo basadi ba mafura. Ponahalo e ntseng e eketseha le ho itlhahisa pepeneneng ha basadi ba batenya ba Afrika Borwa metjheng ya ditaba tsa setjhaba di bontsha tshebedisano e rarahaneng le eo hangata e hananang dipakeng tsa menahano ya kgale ya botle ba Eurocentric le diphihlelo tsa mmele tsa basadi ba batsho ba Afrika Borwa. Polelo ena ya corporeality dibakeng tsa dijithale ha e sebetse feela e le bopaki ba tshusumetso e atileng ya ditekanyetso tsa botle ba Bophirima tseo e leng kgale di na le monyetla wa ho ba mosesaane, letlalo le dikarolo tsa mmele tse tsamaellanang le ditlwaelo tsa Euro-American — empa hape e totobatsa ditsela tseo basadi bana ba buisanang ka tsona, ba hanang le ho hlophisa botjha mehopolo e jwalo mekgweng ya bona ya letsatsi le letsatsi ya ho ikemela. Ho nka karolo ha bona ka mafolofolo ditsong tsa pono tsa marang-rang ho fana ka maikutlo a kamano e fetohang le boitshwaro, moo ho kenyeletswa ka hare ho maemo a botle a Eurocentric ho kopantseng le mefuta e hlahang ya boitlamo bo hlahisitsweng ke Movemente wa Kananelo le Kamohelo ya mmele ka ho fapana ha yona. Moralo wa dipatlisiso e ne e le wa boleng ba tlhahlobo mme o entswe ho tswa ho paradigm ya kaho ya setjhaba e nang le Black Feminist Thought le Endarkened Feminist Epistemology e le meralo e tataisang. Mohlala o ne o e-na le bankakarolo ba robong ba ileng ba thaothwa ka disampole tse nang le sepheo le boithaopo. Dintlha di ile tsa bokellwa ka tshebediso ya dipuisano tse tebileng tsa semi-structured ho hlahloba diphihlelo le maikutlo a basadi ba batsho, ba nonneng ba Afrika Borwa ba nang le Movemente wa Kamohelo le Kananelo ya mmele ka ho fapana ha yona. Tlhaloso ya Phenomenological Analysis e ile ya sebediswa ho sekaseka dintlha, mme diphetho di fana ka maikutlo a hore phehello ya Movemente wa kamohelo le kananelo ya mmele ka ho fapana ha yona e fetela ka nqane ho phetoho ya maikutlo ho diphetoho tsa motheo tsa phihlelo e kenyelletsweng, ho ba setso le sebopeho sa phenomenological ya ho ipona hara basadi ba

batsho, ba nonneng ba Afrika Borwa.

Mantswe a bohlokwa: Movemente wa kamohelo le kananelo ya mmele ka mefuta ya yona, Setshwantsho sa mmele, Boitshwaro, Mafura

I-Abstract

Umehluko ongahambisani nemikhuba ejwayelekile, efana njengobuhlanga, izinkolelo zenkolo, ukuzibandakanya ngokocansi kanye nokwakheka komzimba kuvimba ukuthola izinsiza. Amalunga, ikakhulukazi abesifazane, abaphila nemizimba emikhulu bazithola benqandeka ekutholeni izinsiza okubhebhethekisa isihlava esicwasa isisindo somzimba. Inhloso yalolucwaningo ukubuyekeza izimo abantu besifazane abamnyama, abasebancane baseNingizimu Afrika abakhuluphele abanobudlelwano nenhlangano egqugquzela ukuzithemba ngomzimba ngokwamukela ubuwena. Ukubhekwa kwezinye izihloko ezibhalwe ngabanye ongcweti kuveza ukuba ubuhle baseYurophu naseNtshonalanga kanye nezindlela zempilo bunomthelela omkhulu kwindlela abesizafazane bebala, kanye nabesifazane base Afrika ngokukhethekile. Ukuphakama koMkhankaso Wokuthanda Umzimba okulethe ukuhlonishwa, ukwamukelwa, ukuqashelwa nokubonakala kwezinhlobo zomzimba ezingajwayelekile kubonakala kunike abesifazane abaningi amandla, ikakhulukazi abesifazane abanokukhuluphala. Ukubonakala okukhulayo nokuziveza ngokusobala kwabesifazane abakhulu baseNingizimu Afrika ezinkundleni zokuxhumana kukhombisa ukudidiyela okunzima futhi okuvame ukuphikisana phakathi kwezimiso zobuhle ezibekwe emlandweni ezisuselwa eYurophu kanye nezinto eziphilwayo zomzimba zabesifazane abamnyama baseNingizimu Afrika. Lokhu kukhombisa ubuqotho bomzimba ezindaweni zedijithali akukhombisi nje kuphela ubufakazi bokuthi izinga lobuhle lasentshonalanga elibeke phambili ukuncipha komzimba, umbala wesikhumba kanye nezilinganiso zomzimba ezifana nezaseYurophu naseMelika lithinteka kanjani—futhi kugcizelela izindlela lapho abesifazane bebhekana, bemelana futhi belungisa kabusha lezi zimiso ezinhle ekuziphatheni kwabo nsuku zonke. Ukubamba kwabo iqhaza eliqhubekayo emasikweni okubonwayo aku-inthanethi kubonisa ukuguquka kobudlelwane nesithombe somuntu, lapho ukufakwa ngaphakathi kwezinhlelo zobuhle ezise-Europe kusebenzisana nezindlela ezikhulayo zokuzazisa ezishukumiselwe ingxenye yeMikhankaso Wokwamukela Umzimba. Umgomo wocwaningo wawunesimiso sokuhlola ngokwekhwalithi futhi wenziwa kusukela kumqondo womphakathi wokwakha izindlela zokucabanga zabesifazane abamnyama kanye ne-Endarkened Feminist Epistemology njengohlaka oluholwa phambili. Isampula yayiqukethe ababambiqhaza abayisishiyagalolunye abaqashwe ngokukhethekile nangokuzithandela. Idatha yaqoqwa ngokusebenzisa izingxoxo ezijulile ezingahleleki ngokuphelele ukuze kuhlolwe izipiliyoni nombono wabesifazane abamnyama, abesifazane baseNingizimu Afrika abakhulu mayelana ne-Body Positivity Movement. Ukuhlaziywa Kwe-Phenomenological kusetshenziswe ukuhlaziya

idatha, futhi imiphumela iphakamisa ukuthi umthelela We-Body Positivity Movement wandulela ukushintsha kokuzibona kuphela kuya ekushintsheni okuyisisekelo kokuhlangenwe nakho komzimba, ukuzwana namasiko kanye nesakhiwo se-phenomenological sokuzazi phakathi kwabesifazane abamnyama, abakhuluphele baseNingizimu Afrika.

Amagama Asemqoka: i-Body Positivity Movement, i-Body Image, i-Self-image, ukukhuluphala

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Growing up in a fat body has been quite a harrowing experience. Rather than making use of medically loaded terms such as “obese” or “overweight,” I prefer to make use of the word “fat” as a descriptor as it is widely and easily understood and utilised by many overweight individuals to describe their bodies. When I recall from my childhood, the first comment I would always get as a child was directed at the size of my body, followed by commentary on the outfit I would be wearing on the day. My mother made sure I was always the “best-dressed” little girl everywhere we went. Upon enquiry on why I always had the most stylish clothing items, I discovered that when I was born, the first thing the nurse told my mother was that she gave birth to a very big and “dark child”, this was in reference to my skin tone. To my mother, she interpreted that comment as her having given birth to an ugly child. She then made the decision that she would enhance my beauty through clothing and unique hairstyles. In our conversation, she even recalled how she asked one of her friends to take her clothing store card and buy every stylish piece of clothing in the store.

As a child, I didn’t know being fat was frowned upon until the world made sure, I knew and felt it. In my household no-one would comment on mine or anyone else’s weight. Everyone was accepted for who they were in my family. I have a friend of mine who also grew up in a fat body and I remember how at some point we would refuse to be sent to the shops because of all the body shaming comments we would get in the streets. Although the comments would mainly be pointing out our body weight (i.e. “Look at those two fat children”, followed by laughter), our young minds understood and our young hearts felt the damage those comments were meant to inflict.

I also recall when I got my first stretch marks at the age of 8, which I wasn’t aware of. I was advised by a classmate of mine to ask my mother to purchase Tissue Oil for me, which is formulated to reduce the appearance of scars and stretch marks and promote even skin tone. This classmate of mine explained that her sister also uses it in an attempt to reduce the appearance of her stretchmarks. Upon hearing this, I remember feeling ashamed that I was getting marks on my body which I was supposed to only get when I grew older. I started hating the way I looked.

Then came a time when I went to the doctor for an ailment unrelated to my weight but left the doctor's office with a diet plan. I had to ask my mother how old I was when that happened because all I can remember is being there and listening as my body and my weight were being discussed right in front of me. My mother said I was 8 or 9 years old when the doctor told her that if I didn't lose weight, I would get diabetes and that the way my body was "maturing" quickly, I was going to go on my menstrual cycles prematurely. My mother was distressed and shocked by this revelation and my eating habits were immediately changed because the medical professionals are never believed to have room for errors. Sugar and unhealthy fats were cut out of my diet. My portions were also reduced significantly, and I had to adjust to this uncomfortable change. This caused great feelings of isolation and rejection at school because none of my friends wanted to share my lunchbox because it was too healthy. They would share theirs with me, but no-one wanted my healthy sandwiches and a sip of my bottle of water.

In high school I finally got a bit of autonomy and could choose the kind of items I wanted in my lunchbox, however, I had gotten used to the healthy sandwiches so much that that what was palatable to me and now my friends would enjoy my sandwiches because we were now teenagers and they were attempting to maintain certain body weights. This was also the time when romantic interest would be shown towards one another as teenagers. I remember feeling validated when I got my first real boyfriend at the age of 16, however when that relationship ended because I refused to be coerced into participating in sexual activities with him, he then attacked me using my body. He even went as far as saying he didn't even know why he was attracted to me because I am shaped like "nothing". That's when my self-esteem plummeted and I started acquiring some disordered eating habits in an attempt to lose weight. I never lost any weight but continued restricting my food intake because it made me feel like I was being healthy. I then got my second boyfriend at 18 and as fate would have it, I had the exact same experience I had with my first boyfriend. When I refused to be coerced, my body was pathologised. It was a very hurtful and equally confusing experience for me because I wondered how one can approach a person whom they can see is fat and then when that person turns out to be more than just their body, one decides to degrade them using their body. However, through conversations with friends, male individuals and the media, I got to realise that some people think fat women are so undesirable that they should be grateful when shown some attention and try by all means to hold on to the attention.

When I got to university, in my second year, I met my third boyfriend and this time

things were a bit different. At no point was my body a point of attack. For the first time ever, I felt humanised, I felt visible. I was seen for more than my body. I was even encouraged to embrace my body. However, those feelings were short-lived because the world is anti-fat. Anti-fat attitudes are everywhere, even in those close to us. I remember a friend of mine telling me that her family told her that she had gained weight, but she doesn't realise it yet because she hasn't reached my size and she needs to work on her weight before it gets out of control. I thought to myself, "so, does this mean my body is out of control? Wow!" It was quite disheartening to find out that my body is seen through the lens of negativity.

When the Body Positivity Movement emerged in 2012 and began gaining traction in the following years, it brought with it representation, affirmation and acceptance that I really needed. Seeing other women who looked like me celebrating themselves unapologetically liberated me from the prescriptive views of the world. I ceased caring what the world thought about my body and owned it. I started realising that I am more than a fat body and that's what should be important to me. When people would make comments about my weight I would smile and agree that they were stating facts; "Yes, I am fat, so what?" I felt a peculiar kind of confidence I had never felt before. I felt more secure in my body, and I stopped being worried if people in the restaurant thought the burger I was eating was the reason I'm fat. This is my life and my body; therefore, it is my choice to do as I see fit. I finally felt a sense of liberation.

This study is part of a personal journey as well as an inquiry into the meaning the Body Positivity Movement holds for other Black, Fat South African women.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 The world is not neutral, and we are not equal

Although the world might prescribe that people be treated fairly and justly, especially through the law, it is quite evident that these prescriptions do not apply to every human being who exists in this world. The world is structured in an unequal manner where racial categorisations have rendered Black people to be at the bottom, and as a result rendering the world as Anti- Black. Scholars such as Bulhan (2016, p.242) have engaged this idea of anti-Blackness where he points out how "during the colonisation of the Americas the distinction of races became a convenient justification for exploitation".

Secondly, the world is Anti-women, specifically, Black women. Spates et.al., (2020) highlights this by stating that throughout history, Black women have suffered from being seen as overly sexual, a problem that started during slavery. They were used for both work and as objects for the sexual desires of slave owners who saw them as exotic and different. This problematic view led to many cases of sexual assault and rape of Black enslaved women by slave owners. As a result, Black women were unfairly labelled as overly sexual, which still affects how people see and treat them today. "Black women also tend to experience an increased vulnerability to trauma as a result of the intersection of gender and culture" as shown by research (Bartholomew et.al., 2018, p. 95). Gqola (2007, p.115) also stipulates that:

although "women empowerment" is spoken of there is evidence that South African women are not empowered as can be seen through the rape and other gender-based violence statistics, the rampant sexual harassment at work and public spaces, the restriction of the freedom of Black lesbians and seething homophobia.

Thirdly, the world is Anti-fatness. According to Lewis et.al., (1997), there's a clear bias against overweight individuals, seen in how people assign negative traits to them just because of their body size. As a result, body size becomes a significant factor in what is known as "beautyism," which involves stereotyping and discriminating against people based on their looks. In our appearance-focused society, obesity often leads to negative outcomes, especially for women, affecting both social attitudes and personal body image.

Due to societal prejudice against overweight and obese women, many of them grapple with feelings of body shame. This shame often stems from internalising weight stigma-related experiences. Beyond mere dissatisfaction with appearance, body shame carries a

moral dimension, rooted in the belief that one is falling short of societal standards and expectations. This moral aspect exacerbates the already painful experience of feeling ashamed of one's body, adding layers of judgment and self-criticism to an already challenging situation. (Burnette et,al., 2017).

Vandael (2021), postulates that research on fatness has been largely restricted to its medical aspects, with limited exploration into its broader social dimensions. Only recently has there been a shift towards recognising fatness as a diverse, gendered, and socially constructed phenomenon, as well as a matter of social justice. Simultaneously, the focus of fat studies has mostly been on white bodies. This then opens up two main streams of discourse about fatness: firstly, the medical criterion, where fatness is studied as a health risk, and secondly, the social acceptability criterion which considers social consequences fat people encounter, power differences, and how society deals with fatness. When considering fatness, we also see how these two criteria become viewed differently and health is subsequently seen and accepted as a social instead of a medical issue. Anti-fat bias is often presented as genuine concern and caring about fat people's health, which some scholars, such as Schwartz et.al., (2006) and Elran-Barak & Bar-Anan (2018) show, could lead to negative health consequences because these concerns often stem from false ideas about health and weight.

Against this backdrop of intersecting systems of anti-Blackness, patriarchy, and anti-fat bias, this study seeks to explore how the Body Positivity Movement has influenced the self-image of young, Black, fat women in South Africa. Drawing on the lived experiences of this marginalised group, the research aims to examine how meanings of the body, self-worth, health, and beauty are constructed, challenged, and potentially reconfigured through engagement with body positivity discourses. This chapter has introduced the broader socio-historical and ideological context within which the study is situated, highlighting the problem under investigation, the rationale for the research, as well as the research questions and objectives guiding the inquiry. The chapter thus lays the foundation for the chapters that follow, beginning with a critical review of the literature in Chapter Two, which situates fatness, body image, and body positivity within global and South African contexts.

1.2 Problem Statement

Western beauty and health standards have been the driving force perpetuating weight-based oppression and weight stigma that affects women. Fatness is pathologised and this dehumanises those who exist in bodies that are considered fat. Fatness and perceptions thereof have been and still continue to be immensely contested. In the past 7 years or so, an online movement of solidarity called the Body Positivity Movement has been gaining traction and getting the attention of celebrities, mass media sources and fashion companies (Streeter, 2019). Although the Body Positivity Movement is not confined to the internet and mass media, its effects can be seen mostly on these platforms. This movement has been very influential in reconstructing views on body image and advocating for marginalised body types such as "fat women, women of colour, women living with disabilities, transgender women and women of lower socioeconomic statuses" (O'Hara et al., 2021, p.226). The main objectives of The Body Positivity Movement are to confront, challenge and possibly change perceptions of weight, body size, health and physical appearance in order to create acceptance and respect for individuals regardless of their bodies. This supports the idea that weight-stigma is an issue that allowed for unfair prejudice in terms of health and beauty towards fat individuals, especially women. Despite growing scholarship on body positivity, there remains a lack of in-depth qualitative and phenomenological accounts that centre the lived experiences of young, Black, fat South African women, particularly within their specific socio-cultural and digital contexts.

1.3 Rationale

As diverse as South Africa is, the influence of Western beauty ideals on the youth is undeniable, especially with many having access to the internet and social media platforms. As a result of social media exposure and influences, the acceptance and embracing of our diversity seems to exclude different body types, ideas of health and beauty. This suggests that dominant beauty standards continue to shape self-perceptions in ways that marginalise already vulnerable groups, particularly young Black women in larger bodies.

However, with the activism that is being led by the Body Positivity Movement, more women are seen celebrating their bodies unapologetically, by displaying their preferred dress code, regardless of their body types, including young, Black, fat South African women. This sheds some light on how one remains invisible by virtue of belonging to a marginalised group and how important the emergence of successful liberation psychology practices are for victims of oppression. It also highlights the potential of body positivity as

a site of resistance, identity reconstruction, and psychological affirmation.

It has been noteworthy how a lot of young, Black, fat South African women have come to celebrate their bodies more on mainstream media, following the Body Positivity Movement. This can be mainly seen through social media posts with hashtags such as #bodypositivity #bodypositivitymovement #plussize #plussizefashion.

Despite this increased visibility, there is limited scholarly understanding of how these representations translate into lived experiences and self-perceptions.

While some research has been done on the Body Positivity Movement, there continues to be space for further engagement and paying attention to how the movement is experienced by young, fat, Black South African women. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by centring the voices and lived experiences of this group within a South African context.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions for this study were centred on the beliefs and ideas Black; fat South African women held and/or still hold about their bodies and the influences thereof. Research questions also explored ideas of health and beauty. The core questions of the research were:

- In what ways has the Body Positivity Movement influenced the way Black, fat women perceive themselves?
- How has the Body Positivity Movement affected self and body- image ideals of Black, fat women?

1.5 Research objectives

- To get an understanding of the ways in which the Body Positivity Movement influences how Black, fat women perceive themselves.
- To get an understanding of how the Body Positivity Movement impacts Black, fat women's self and body image ideals.

1.6 Definition of Key Words

Body Positivity Movement:

The term “body positivity” can be defined as “any message, visual or written, that challenges dominant ways of viewing the physical body in accordance with beauty ideals and encourages the reclaiming of embodiment and control over one’s self-image” (Cwynar-Horta, 2016 p.38)

The body positivity movement is a concept that is rooted in social identity and encompasses various constructs such as attitudes towards one’s own body, body acceptance, body appreciation and body love. It also provides approaches to appearance, the interpretation of information about bodies, rejection of Eurocentric media-promoted appearance ‘ideals and perceptions of body acceptance by others. The aim is to provide protection of individuals physical and mental health and wellbeing and grant them the respect they deserve (O’Hara, Ahmed & Elashie, 2021, p.226).

Self-Image:

The ‘picture’ people have of themselves and the value they attach to themselves (Moore et.al., 2017).

Fat:

The concept of being "fat" in scientific terms refers to the accumulation of adipose tissue in the body, which is primarily composed of fat cells (adipocytes). The body stores energy in the form of fat, which serves various functions such as insulating the body, protecting organs, and serving as an energy reserve. When discussing being "fat," it generally pertains to an excess accumulation of this tissue, which can be measured and evaluated through various scientific means. The concept of being "fat" involves a complex interplay of genetic, hormonal, behavioural, and environmental factors. It is characterised by an excess accumulation of adipose tissue, which can be quantified through measurements like BMI and body fat percentage. It is therefore, a term that refers to individuals with “body weight that is greater than what is considered normal or healthy for a certain height. It is generally due to excess fat. However, it may also be due to extra muscle, bone, or water.” (also referred to as overweight or obese) (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, n.d). Within a critical feminist framework, ‘fat’ is understood not merely as a biomedical descriptor of body size, but as a socially and politically constructed category through which bodies are regulated, stigmatised, and hierarchically valued. It is a

relational identity shaped by intersecting systems of power, including patriarchy, racism, and capitalism, rather than a neutral or purely physiological condition.

1.7 Outline of Chapters

This dissertation has five chapters as outlined below:

Chapter One introduces the study providing the study context, the problem statement, and objectives winding off with the chapter online.

Chapter Two which provides an in-depth review of the literature relating to the pathologisation of fatness and factors that seem to play a role therein, the body positivity's attempts at depathologising fatness as well as body positivity in South African media. The chapter also discusses the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study.

Chapter Three covers the research methodology which includes the research paradigm, the study approach and design, the study setting, study population, sampling method and sample size, the data collection method and procedure, the data analysis method and procedure, the data analysis method used to analyse the data as well as measures employed to ensure that the data collected and analysed was of scientific quality.

Chapter Four encompasses the findings of the study which includes the themes that emerged during the data analysis and a discussion of the themes in relation to the analysis.

Chapter Five is the final chapter of this study, and it covers the discussion of the results in relation to the literature undertaken in the study, along with the conclusion, limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the study within a broader socio-historical, political, and cultural context that reveals how bodies—particularly those of Black, young, fat women—are regulated, pathologised, and hierarchically valued. By foregrounding the intersecting forces of anti-Blackness, patriarchy, and anti-fat bias, the chapter has demonstrated that self-image does not emerge in isolation but is produced through unequal power relations embedded within social, cultural, and institutional structures. The problem statement,

rationale, research questions, and objectives outlined in this chapter collectively underscore the need to centre the voices and lived experiences of Black, fat South African women in understanding the impact of the Body Positivity Movement.

In articulating the significance of this study, the chapter has highlighted the absence of contextually grounded research that examines body positivity through an intersectional and decolonial lens in South Africa. This gap points to the importance of critically engaging with existing scholarly work on fatness, beauty ideals, and body image in order to understand how dominant discourses have been historically produced and how they continue to shape contemporary subjectivities.

Chapter Two therefore builds on this foundation by reviewing relevant literature on the pathologisation of fatness, the socio-cultural and colonial origins of dominant beauty and health discourses, and the emergence of the Body Positivity Movement as a counter-narrative. Through this engagement, the next chapter situates the present study within existing academic debates and further clarifies the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform the analysis of Black, fat women's embodied experiences.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of literature relevant to the study, focusing on how fatness, body image, and self-perception have been historically constructed, regulated, and contested within social, cultural, and medical discourses. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship, the chapter examines the pathologisation of fatness, the influence of Eurocentric beauty ideals, patriarchal and colonial power structures, and the role of medical and media institutions in perpetuating weight stigma. It further explores the emergence of the Body Positivity Movement as a counter-hegemonic response that seeks to challenge dominant narratives surrounding bodies, health, and beauty, with particular attention to how these dynamics manifest within South African contexts. The chapter concludes by outlining the theoretical frameworks, Black Feminist Thought and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, that ground the study, thereby situating the research within a critical, decolonial, and intersectional scholarly tradition.

Being part of a marginalised community can alter the self-image of the individuals experiencing this marginalisation. People are mostly marginalised due to their race, sexuality, religious and cultural beliefs and body types. This might create feelings of rejection and shame which lead to a different reality which is one that differs from one which most individuals share. Sieff (2017) calls this altered reality experienced by marginalised communities a "trauma world". The trauma world is formed by three dynamics:

1. "Hyper-vigilance

The external world is viewed through a lens of fear: We carry an embodied and implicit mistrust of other people, situations and opportunities.

2. Disconnection

Parts of ourselves become ostracised: We feel distanced from our emotions, our bodies and aspects of our personality.

3. Shame" (Sieff, 2017, p.2)

Our identity then becomes intertwined with "internalised feelings of inadequacy and being undeserving of relationships" (Sieff, 2017, p. 2). The fear, disconnection, and shame felt by marginalised individuals can deeply affect both their inner thoughts and their interactions with the world. Internally, these feelings can cause self-doubt, insecurity, and a distorted sense of self-worth. Externally, they can lead to difficulties in connecting with others, resulting in barriers to meaningful relationships. Some may withdraw or react defensively, which makes it hard to engage with others and the world. This cycle of isolation and misunderstanding can reinforce their feelings of fear, disconnection, and shame, creating a difficult cycle to break (Sieff, 2017). For individuals who go through the trauma of widespread weight stigma, the impact thereof is these individuals being the target of prejudice and discrimination and experiencing inequities in many realms of life from employment to health care, to education. More so if they are fat Black women, they tend to experience gendered racism and weight stigma simultaneously and this can cause a negatively altered sense of identity for them.

2.2 How the world pathologises fatness

According to Streeter (2019), the societal perception of being fat has been constructed with negative ideas, it is perceived as a lack of control, unattractive, a sign of pathology and a threat to women's femininity. The perception of being fat particularly impacts Western middle-class white women, and increasingly women of colour. In response to this Western perception of being fat, many individuals find themselves employing various measures such as dieting, cosmetic surgery and exercise in order to avoid being perceived as fat, as an attempt to conform to normative feminine body ideals. Given the prevalent societal emphasis on thinness, which actively polices and regulates women's bodies to fit within predetermined ideals, it is unsurprising that a significant portion of the body positivity movement centers around challenging these norms, particularly concerning fatness. In essence, body positivity manifests as a counter-narrative, aiming to challenge and restructure prevailing beauty standards by showcasing and endorsing a diverse range of physical appearances. This movement often finds expression through content posted on social media platforms, with the primary goal of encouraging acceptance and celebration of bodies that deviate from conventional beauty norms (Stevens & Griffiths, 2020, Abstract section).

2.2.1 Eurocentric influences

Eurocentric ideals, including ideals regarding physical beauty are conveyed to Black youth, particularly through mass media. These beauty ideals may be detrimental to young Black women and are often, almost impossible for young Black women to achieve. Until recently, there has been a great absence of Black women from representations of beauty in the media, and when they are included and portrayed as beautiful, it is when they possess features which are considered Caucasian such as straight hair and a light complexion, and this has resulted in the misrepresentation and marginalisation of women who do not fit the portrayed stereotype (Spurgas, 2005). In the context of Western norms surrounding bodily and beauty ideals, Black, fat women are often perceived as a challenge due to their bodies representing a form of defiance and opposition against the set Eurocentric expectations of physical appearances. Their bodies are characterised as "unruly and disobedient," embodying a symbolic resistance against colonial ideas that aimed to dictate how they should look. By proudly embracing their Blackness and defying conventional standards of thinness, Black, fat women assert their autonomy and challenge the colonial constructs that have historically marginalised certain body types. In essence, the bodies of Black, fat women serve as a powerful and intentional counter-narrative which seeks to disrupt established norms of beauty and identity (Shaw, 2006).

Black women are often judged against the Western beauty ideal, which values characteristics like being white, thin, heterosexual, Christian, and affluent. Those who don't fit this mould, such as fat, Black women, often face exclusion and disapproval from society. However, there's a growing movement to challenge and redefine beauty norms, especially concerning race, age, and body size. This movement aims to promote inclusivity and celebrate diverse forms of beauty, moving away from the narrow standards set by traditional beauty ideals. Instead, it encourages a more accepting perspective that recognises beauty in a wide range of identities and appearances (Vandael, 2021).

Pornotroping reflects a form of objectification that not only sexualises but also dehumanises Black women, reducing them to mere objects for consumption. The term encompasses a range of visual, verbal, or symbolic representations that perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to the exoticisation and fetishisation of Black female bodies. This phenomenon is rooted in the power dynamics established during colonial periods, where the bodies of Black women were often exploited and commodified for the pleasure

and consumption of others. Addressing and dismantling such practices requires a critical examination of the historical and systemic forces that have perpetuated these harmful norms. It involves challenging and rejecting the objectification of Black women's bodies, fostering a more respectful and inclusive discourse that recognises the agency and humanity of individuals regardless of their race or gender. Pornotroping refers to "a process involving superficial, reductive, or voyeuristic handling of an individual's body where the bodies are usually commodified through the fetishisation of female partners as merely flesh, commodified through fetishisation" (Mami, 2021, p. 88). This can be seen in the case of Saartjie Baartman, an indigenous South African woman who was enslaved and taken to Europe where she was displayed in a human zoo in London and Paris. She was put on display due to her large breasts and buttocks, which were considered exceptionally different from the thinness valued by white standards, her body shape was initially seen as abnormal. However, it later became a model for fashionable European silhouettes (Senyonga & Luna, 2021).

2.2.2 Male Influence

Discussions surrounding bodies frequently place men in a position of authority over women's bodies, while allowing them to evade similar scrutiny of their own bodies. This pattern reflects a power dynamic wherein men assert themselves as more capable of making objective judgments about women's bodies, often rooted in perceptions of masculinity and rationality. Men are seen as speaking from a supposedly objective and rational standpoint, granting them authority in providing guidance and advice to women—a pedagogic role. This dynamic arises from the belief that women are inherently illogical or mistaken about their own bodies, reinforcing gendered stereotypes and perpetuating traditional norms that limit women's agency and autonomy. To address these issues, it's crucial to challenge entrenched gender roles, advocate for equality, and affirm the right of all individuals, regardless of gender, to autonomy and authority over their bodies (Blood, 2004).

The stance adopted by socially and culturally dominant men—particularly those embedded within heteronormative and patriarchal structures—regarding women's bodies suggests that men occupy the position of arbiter in determining the lovability and societal acceptability of women. Within this framework, women, especially young women and those socialised within contexts that valorise male approval or conform to restrictive gender norms, do not perceive themselves as inherently lovable. Instead, their sense of worth and

desirability becomes contingent upon the internalization of the male gaze, rendering their self-perception dependent on the approval and transformative evaluation imposed by men. It's the affection and validation of a man, particularly within the context of heterosexual desire, that renders these women's bodies acceptable and positions them as objects of sexual desire for men. The idealised femininity is often equated with a specific body type, characterised by ample breasts, elongated legs, and a slender waist. According to Lewis et.al., (1997), the exploration of various factors associated with anti-fat prejudice has illuminated the roots of negative attitudes towards individuals with larger bodies. Notably, research by Blood (2004) and Lewis et.al., (1997) reveals that men tend to exhibit more negative attitudes than women in this context. This gender disparity suggests that the stronger anti-fat attitudes held by men could significantly exacerbate the social and economic challenges faced by heavier women. These attitudes may infiltrate different facets of society, impacting interpersonal relationships, professional opportunities, and overall well-being, especially for women with larger bodies.

The gender gap in anti-fat attitudes underscores the necessity for targeted interventions to challenge and dismantle harmful stereotypes and biases related to body size. Initiatives aimed at promoting body positivity, debunking stereotypes, and fostering a more inclusive society are crucial in mitigating the harmful effects of anti-fat prejudice. This includes raising awareness, providing education, and advocating for policies that promote equality and combat discrimination based on body size.

The contradictory nature of societal expectations becomes apparent when women express feelings of dissatisfaction and anxiety about their bodies. On one hand, such concerns are often dismissed as superficial preoccupations with physical appearance, a dismissal often tied to stereotypical views of femininity. Yet, within the discourse of body image, this dismissal can contribute to the development of body dissatisfaction.

Simultaneously, women are pressured to conform to an idealised and desirable form of femininity, often embodied in an unrealistic physical standard. This ideal is frequently unattainable for many 'ordinary' women, creating a double bind where they are chastised for caring too much about their appearance while being expected to strive for an unattainable norm. These conflicting dynamics place a significant burden on women, exacerbating body image issues and mental health challenges.

Addressing these issues requires challenging societal norms, promoting diverse representations of femininity, and cultivating an inclusive environment that embraces the diverse and authentic expressions of women's bodies (Blood, 2004).

2.2.3 The colonisation and moralisation of food

Colonisation brought significant changes to food practices in various regions, disregarding historical habits shaped by geography, climate, religion, economics, and social factors. Western science imposed a universal idea of an ideal diet, overlooking traditional practices rooted in diverse cultures. This Eurocentric perspective marginalised rich food diversity. The idea of an ideal diet, often Western-influenced, shaped global views on nutrition. Recognising and valuing cultural diversity in food is crucial for understanding healthy diets inclusively. Moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach respects unique dietary traditions shaped by local environments, cultures, and histories, promoting equitable and culturally sensitive health promotion (Dey & Maart, 2020).

Askegaard et.al., (2014) postulate that food choices have become one of the most significant lifestyle indicators, with an increased focus being placed on how these food choices can aid in improving the body's health condition and physical appearance. This provides a segue to the moralisation of food, which Mulder, et.al. (2015, p. 234) define as "the accretion of moral value to activities or substances (i.e. food), that previously had no moral value". The moralisation of food choices is intricately linked to systems of power, including the influence of policymakers and market agents. These entities play a pivotal role in shaping and guiding individuals' food choices. The prevalent narrative perpetuates the belief that certain foods are inherently "good" or "bad," with the suggestion that consuming the designated "good" foods in abundance equates to a significantly healthier lifestyle.

This narrative extends beyond mere nutritional guidelines; it influences consumers to translate their food choices into behavioural rules. In this construct, making "good" food choices is associated not only with positive health outcomes but also with broader implications such as maintaining a positive body image and exercising high self- control. Moreover, it implies a moral dimension, suggesting that individuals who make "good" food choices are deemed moral, righteous, and decent. The impact of this narrative is profound, contributing to the creation of a moral hierarchy surrounding food. Such moralisation can lead to feelings of guilt or shame for deviating from perceived "good" food choices. Addressing these dynamics requires a critical examination of the influence of powerful entities in shaping these narratives and promoting a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of food choices that considers individual autonomy, cultural diversity, and holistic well-being.

The intertwining of colonisation, moralisation of food, and weight discrimination is evident in the way societal norms around food consumption are perpetuated by the media, often resulting in feelings of stigmatisation for individuals in larger bodies, particularly women. The prevailing stereotypes and discrimination faced by these individuals are rooted in a perceived failure to conform to weight and body size norms dictated by societal expectations. As a consequence, those who do not align with these norms may experience negative self-image and self-stigmatisation. The societal pressures and biases contribute to a synthesis of emotions, including feelings of guilt and shame. This negative emotional impact can be particularly pronounced in individuals who, due to their body size, deviate from the idealised standards perpetuated by cultural and media influences. Addressing weight discrimination involves dismantling these ingrained stereotypes, challenging societal norms, and promoting body positivity. Recognising the diverse range of body sizes and shapes as valid and acceptable is essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that mitigates the harmful effects of weight-based stigma (Askegaard et.al., 2014; Mulder et al., 2015).

2.2.4 The role of medical professionals in perpetuating weight stigma

In an attempt to further legitimise anti-fatness, medical professionals are included in order to 'solve' the problem of fatness and affirm the negative perceptions thereof. This is seen in how obesity has come to be perceived as a medical condition that is also associated with numerous health conditions such as diabetes, heart diseases, hypertension, just to a name a few. While this may be the case, it is critical to problematise and further engage why being overweight or obese is viewed as the main contributor to some of these health conditions even though thin people also acquire such health conditions. This could suggest that weight loss might not prevent these conditions, however, it is imperative to acknowledge that weight loss can assist in reducing the risk of these health conditions as well. This leads to the colonisation and moralisation of food which subsequently lead to phenomena such as "diet culture".

According to Poraj-Weder et.al., (2021), the prevailing motivation behind dietary changes typically revolves around weight loss, with individuals often prioritising this objective over other factors such as enhanced energy levels, long-term health maintenance, prevention of weight gain, and overall well-being. This fixation on weight-related goals is largely influenced by societal pressures surrounding body weight and appearance. The cultural narrative surrounding dieting tends to elevate weight loss as the primary indicator

of health and success. This narrative is reinforced by media, advertising, and societal norms that often equate thinner bodies with improved health and attractiveness. Consequently, individuals embarking on dietary changes may tend to emphasise weight loss as their primary motivation, reflecting the pervasive influence of societal expectations.

Encouraging individuals to appreciate and embrace diverse body shapes and sizes can help mitigate the negative impact of normative body ideals on body image. Additionally, fostering a culture that values health and well-being over narrow aesthetic standards can contribute to a more positive and inclusive approach to body image and weight-related behaviors (Toselli et al., 2016). This can be seen through the objectives of 'diet culture'.

"Diet Culture" refers to a set of practices and ideologies related to dieting, characterised as a system of societal or cultural beliefs, customs, and behaviours that prioritise an individual's visual appearance, particularly focusing on weight and body size over overall physical and mental well-being. It promotes a thin body as the epitome of health without considering context, and encourages behaviours like calorie counting, exercise, and dieting as lifelong pursuits to achieve weight loss. Diet culture often assigns a moralistic value to individuals conforming to the thin ideal, influenced by Western beauty standards portrayed in the media (O'Shea, 2020). Women, more than men, experience and are influenced by diet culture, leading to engagement in corrective weight-related behaviours like dieting, cosmetic surgery, excessive exercising, and the development of eating disorders. Dieting, therefore, can be viewed as a gendered issue, positioning women as self-policing agents striving to attain a standard of femininity shaped by patriarchal inequalities and internalised male standards of female beauty. The consequences of diet culture include social and aesthetic repercussions for women in larger bodies, resulting in higher costs for clothing and work discrimination based on assumptions about their competence in certain occupations due to body size (Gruys, 2012).

The influence of diet culture is prominently observed through social media, particularly on Instagram, owing to its vast reach and exposure. Dedicated accounts on the platform specifically focus on dieting, "thinspiration" (thinspo), "fitspiration" (fitspo), as well as the marketing of weight loss products and narratives related to weight management. These accounts showcase products and practices associated with hyper-femininity, including supplements, weight loss surgery, exercise routines for weight loss, and shaping clothing. Such representations have become normalised within the concept of femininity. Instagram serves as an instant portal to these images, providing a platform for users to engage in

comparisons. The prevalence of these themes on the platform contributes significantly to the perpetuation and normalisation of diet culture, impacting perceptions of body image, beauty standards, and the pursuit of an idealised femininity (O'Shea, 2020).

2.3 The Body positivity movement's role in depathologising fatness

Being part of a minority or marginalised group can be so emotionally impactful that it either leads to a learned and shared helplessness or a revolutionary rebellion through which the oppressed attempt to liberate themselves. Freire (1998) posits that when those who have been oppressed find the courage to speak out, it can lead to the development of critical consciousness. This heightened awareness has the potential to bring about radical transformations, not only allowing the oppressed individuals to humanise themselves in the process but also facilitating the liberation of those who were their oppressors.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the breaking of the silence from the oppressed gave rise to movements of solidarity such as the Black is beautiful movement which emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s, urging Black Americans to reject the prevailing white standards of beauty. As Black individuals started defining their own ideals and embracing their cultural heritage, a newfound appreciation for the beauty of dark skin, kinky hair, broad noses, and full lips began to flourish within certain segments of the Black community (Neal & Wilson, 1989). The Black Lives Matter Movement unequivocally and purposefully advocates for the respect and survival of Black lives (Bartholomew et.al., 2018). The Fat Rights Movement asserts that obesity is not primarily a matter of personal choice but is significantly influenced by Western Society, the food industry, and individual biological factors, making it challenging to prevent or reverse weight gain for certain individuals. Advocates argue that weight is an intrinsic aspect of an individual, and discriminatory treatment based on weight is a direct violation of basic human dignity (Hosking, 2015). The Body Positivity Movement "rejects unrealistic and narrowly defined beauty standards, urging individuals to challenge prevailing societal messages on beauty. It promotes the acceptance of diverse body sizes and appearances as attractive, encouraging a more inclusive and positive perspective on self-image" (Lazuka et.al., 2020, p. 86).

The oppression faced by marginalised individuals seems to have mobilised a substantial following, exposing or attempting to highlight the façade of control and dominance maintained by oppressive force (Watkins & Shulman, 2010). It is also noteworthy how oppression faced by marginalised individuals requires a joint relentless and consistent

rebellion against oppressive forces for the façade of control and dominance to be exposed and possibly dismantled.

2.3.1 The Body Positivity Movement

The Body Positivity Movement, primarily an online solidarity movement, is grounded in the principle that "all bodies are good bodies." The term “body positivity” can be defined as “any message, visual or written, that challenges dominant ways of viewing the physical body in accordance with beauty ideals and encourages the reclaiming of embodiment and control over one’s self-image” (Cwynar-Horta, 2016 p.38). It actively challenges prevailing norms in mainstream media by advocating for representation of marginalised body types. The movement questions the common association of "healthy" with traditionally accepted bodies, challenging assumptions about a person's health based solely on their physical appearance. Its goal is to enhance visibility and foster acceptance by asserting that even if an individual may be clinically unhealthy, they still deserve respect, love, and, notably, self-love.

The primary goals of the Body Positivity Movement are to confront dominant beauty standards, foster acceptance and appreciation for all bodies regardless of their shape, size, or features, and redirect attention towards valuing the functionality and health of the body rather than solely its appearance. Central elements of the movement involve recognising and cherishing the distinctive traits of one's body, celebrating attributes that diverge from idealised portrayals in media, broadening the concept of beauty, fostering inner self-affirmation, tending to the body's requirements, and consciously curating information to uphold and enhance a positive body image (Cohen et al., 2021).

In a study conducted by Cohen et al. (2019), an experimental investigation was undertaken to explore the impact of exposure to body-positive Instagram content on the mood and body image of young women. The findings demonstrated that even brief exposure to body-positive posts on Instagram correlated with positive enhancements in the mood, body satisfaction, and body appreciation among the participants. This was observed in comparison to those who viewed either thin-ideal or appearance-neutral posts. Participants were randomly assigned to view content falling into one of these categories on Instagram. Lizzo, an influential American artist and body positivity activist, stands out as a prominent figure challenging normative images of performers. As a Black and plus-size rapper, singer, dancer, and performer, she has become a commodified representation of body positivity. Lizzo's self-love messaging resonates widely, reaching a diverse fan base that

looks to her for guidance and inspiration. While she is noted for disrupting body terrorism through her body-positive politic, some audiences perceive her approach as a neoliberal model of self-love (Senyonga & Luna, 2021).

2.3.2 Body Positivity Literature

The Body Positivity Movement not only brought about the liberation of marginalised body types on the internet, but it also inspired authors who would make personal contributions to the field. One such author is (Taylor, 2021, who in her book*, The Body Is Not an Apology, The Power Of Radical Self-Love*, writes about how all injustices in the world (including weight- based stigma) directly affect the body, which is something all of us as individuals in the world have in common. She envisions a radical self-love world which is free from all these oppressive systems which often make it deadly for humans to live in their bodies. She goes on to state that the relationship we have with our own bodies directly impacts how we view and interact with other bodies. She suggests that if we transform the negative relationships we've had with our bodies and let go of the internalised shame and negative associations with our bodies then we become better equipped to enlighten others and disrupt systems of oppression which affect other bodies in the world. To achieve this radical self-love, which is deeper than self- acceptance, self-confidence and self-esteem, we would need to ask ourselves tough questions from a place of grace and grounding in order to develop more insight into previously held ideas about our bodies.

Crabbe (2017) also shares her personal journey of struggling with disordered eating to body positivity in her book, *Body Positive Power: How to Stop Dieting, Make Peace with Your Body, and Live* and seeks to empower her readers to do the same. She highlights how western beauty standards have caused women to hate their bodies which causes them to engage in extreme dieting behaviours and cosmetic surgery to achieve what is perceived to be the perfect body. She notes how the idea that thinness equals to happiness is just a myth by pointing out how women who engage in behaviours which aim to maintain their thinness admit to not enjoying those behaviours. Crabbe (2017) encourages intuitive eating rather than restrictive eating and challenges traditional ideas of health by emphasising how emotional and mental health are equally important. She also encourages self-love by guiding readers on how to reject negative self-talk, curating a body-positive social media feed, and finding a supportive community. She also emphasises how imperative it is to embrace all bodies while rejecting conventional societal beauty standards.

Baker (2015), also contributed to Body Positivity through her book, *Things no one tells fat girls: A handbook for unapologetic living* which highlights how society and media perpetuate weight-based stigma which places conditions of worth on those who don't fit the ideal, causing them to seek ways to reduce themselves so that they can feel worthy. She goes on to dismantle myths around beauty, health and weight and she argues that confidence and happiness are achievable at any body size. She states that self-worth is not and shouldn't be tied to body size and she encourages readers to start embracing their bodies as they are and not to wait for weight-loss to be happy and confident. She encourages people to reclaim autonomy over their bodies by rejecting harmful messages about their bodies, surround themselves with positive influences, and to curate their social media feeds so that they're only exposed to empowering social media posts. Readers are also encouraged to challenge weight-based stigma in everyday conversations and to advocate for inclusivity.

2.3.2.1 Body Positivity and its discontents

The Racialised Origins of Fatphobia

While mainstream discourse often frames fatphobia as a modern medical or aesthetic concern, critical fat studies argue that it is deeply rooted in colonial history. Sabrina Strings (2019) argues that the fear of the "fat Black body" was a central component in the construction of racial hierarchies. By linking thinness to protestant work ethics and whiteness, and fatness to "savage" or "unrefined" Blackness, colonial structures weaponised body size to justify racial subjugation. For the young, Black South African woman, this historical context means that her body is not just "large" in a physical sense, but is a site where historical colonial surveillance meets modern beauty standards (Strings, 2019).

The Body Positivity Paradox and Digital Surveillance

The rise of digital body cultures has transformed how women who utilise digital platforms view themselves. However, this visibility comes at a cost. Rosalind Gill (2017) highlights the phenomenon of "postfeminist self-surveillance," where women are encouraged to love their bodies, yet are simultaneously pressured to constantly monitor and curate their appearance for the digital gaze. This is compounded by the "empowerment" narrative. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) critiques "popular feminism," arguing that movements like Body Positivity have often been commodified—turned into

a "brand" that sells products rather than genuine liberation. For Black women, this means the Body Positivity movement often feels like it only celebrates "acceptable" fatness—bodies that are curvaceous in the "right" places while remaining groomed and consumer-friendly (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2021).

Social Media and the Comparison Trap

The psychological impact of Instagram-based body culture is significant. Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) found that even "body-positive" content can trigger appearance comparison, as the focus remains squarely on the aesthetic. Cohen et al. (2019, 2021) further suggest that while body-positive content can improve mood, it often fails to dismantle the "objectified" state of the viewer. For Black South African women, the "comparison trap" is multi-layered: they must navigate global Western beauty standards and local cultural expectations of "thickness," all while under the constant gaze of social media algorithms that often prioritise thinner, lighter-skinned influencers (Cohen et al., 2021).

Embodiment, Trauma, and the Political Body

Finally, the experience of being a fat Black woman is one of profound "embodiment." Roxane Gay (2017) describes the fat body as a "cage" or a "fortress" built in response to trauma and societal hostility. This perspective moves the literature beyond simple "body image" and into the realm of "fat identity" as a political category (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009). Virginia Sole-Smith (2023) reinforces this by identifying "diet culture" as a system of social regulation that disproportionately targets marginalised bodies. In this light, for a young Black South African woman to claim "Body Positivity" is not just a personal choice; it is an act of resistance against a global system designed to keep her body under regulation (Gay, 2017; Sole-Smith, 2023).

2.3.3 Body Positivity in South Africa

Prior to colonisation and exposure to Western ideas of health and beauty, there was, and possibly still are African ideas of health and beauty that are held and need to be taken into consideration when considering African women's bodies.

Njiofor (2018) is of the view that, in African aesthetics, beauty is not solely determined by the pleasant appearance and harmony of an aesthetic object but also engages the

theoretico- practical cognitive faculties of judgment. It extends beyond mere physical features to encompass a celebration of meaning, value, quality, worth, and desirability inherent in things. This perspective on beauty is evident in its connection to various aspects beyond the body's physical features, such as good behaviour, skills, knowledge, dress, strength, and even fatness. In African cultures, fatness, for instance, is associated with fertility in women. Therefore, beauty, in the African context, transcends superficial physical appearances and encompasses a broader spectrum of qualities and attributes. A study conducted by Puoane et.al. (2005) in Khayelitsha, Cape Town among Black female community healthcare workers revealed that they were of the opinion that a woman should be round, and should feel herself when she moves. She should not be light, and everyone should admire her movements. Nevertheless, among Black South African youth, these perspectives appear to have encountered challenges due to the homogenisation of beauty ideals and their broad dissemination across cultures by Western media (Spurgas, 2005).

Motseki & Oyedemi, (2017) are of the opinion that the prevailing cultural ideology of beauty among young Black women in South Africa is shaped by the influence of cultural colonisation, which upholds proximity to European culture as the ideal standard. On social media platforms, the depicted ideal feminine body is often slim and fair in complexion. The pursuit of this beauty ideal goes beyond natural attributes, leading to practices such as skin bleaching to achieve a lighter skin tone. This perception of beauty also extends to hair, where hairstyles resembling European or Asian textures are favoured over natural African hair. Women may resort to processing the texture of their African hair or opting for weaves to align with this perceived ideal. The influence of cultural colonisation is evident in the preference for Eurocentric beauty standards in both physical appearance and hair aesthetics.

According to feminist, body positivity activist and blogger Nomali Cele (2019), Fat individuals often encounter pervasive societal messaging that implies their body construction is inherently wrong. In a society that thrives on promoting scarcity and adhering to certain body norms, there is conditional approval granted to fat individuals if they align with the notion of being "healthy." While exercise and the presence of fat athletes highlight the positive aspects of physical activity, the societal issue lies in the requirement to actively disapprove of fatness in order to be deemed valid. The societal fear of fatness often necessitates individuals, even if they are big, to prove their commitment to health and actively distance themselves from the stigma associated with being fat.

Cele’s (2019) findings suggest that there seems to be a certain kind of fat body type that

is acceptable and others that are not, which speaks to weight stigmatisation. These findings are similar to those obtained by Puoane et al., (2005) where the Khayelitsha community health workers valued being overweight but also recognised the constraints imposed by obesity such as, these statements reflect societal perceptions and challenges associated with being overweight. The comments highlight the negative stereotypes and biases individuals may face, such as the assumption of pregnancy. Additionally, the practical aspects, like the cost and aesthetics of larger-sized clothing, are noted. The mention of the physical strain and continuous fatigue suggests the impact on one's well-being. Interestingly, while the women express a general appreciation for a moderately obese woman, there is an underlying societal preference for thinness. This reflects the internalisation of beauty standards that prioritise thinness despite recognising and valuing diversity in body sizes. The statements shed light on the complex interplay between personal preferences, societal expectations, and the impact of weight-related stereotypes. The influence of media on body dissatisfaction is underscored, emphasising that women and girls are not merely passive recipients but actively participate in the uptake, circulation, and amplification of societal messages regarding body ideals. This involvement is evident in the sharing and endorsement of implicit and explicit messages on social media, contributing to perceptions of the value associated with different body shapes, sizes, colours, ages, and gender performance. Moreover, these pervasive ideals are noted to be intertwined with issues of racism and white supremacy. This suggests that beauty standards and societal expectations, particularly in the context of body image, are not only shaped by cultural norms but are also influenced by deeper systemic factors that perpetuate discriminatory ideologies (O'Hara et al., 2021).

2.3.4 Body Positivity in South African Media

Body Positivity that alludes to the appreciation of women in fat bodies is not a new phenomenon in South African media. In music, Mbaqanga artist, Mbongeni Ngema can be heard expressing his appreciation for women in fat bodies through some of his songs titled "Woza My Fohloza" and "Stimela sase Zola". The late Jazz music artist Hugh Masekela also composed a song titled "Thanayi", which translates into "Child of joy". In this song, he sings about a woman named Nomalungelo who has gained weight as a result of living a stress-free life and eating "well". Kwaito group Trompies also have a song titled "Fohloza", which makes references to how pleasant fat women are to be in interpersonal relationships with.

Poetry has also contributed its fair share of appreciation of the African woman's 'curvy' body.

In an interview which was published by Poetry Potion, theatre practitioner and Poet Napo Masheane demonstrates how Body politics and women's voices have been an important part of her work. She mentions how it was easy for her because, as a woman, she could relate to other women and coming from a family of "big but healthy women" and meeting other women that have experienced their own body issues prompted her to begin the body politics conversation. And that's the psyche that her first solo theatre performance, *My Bum is Genetic, So Deal With It!* tapped into.

Napo states that what she was trying to achieve with her work was to get people to pause and be curious about possible reasons women are fat instead of focusing of their physical appearance. Consequently, this body of work left many women feeling a lot more understood. Indeed, understanding their own issues and just being able to laugh them off and feel better. Even though the conversation continues, Napo doesn't want to place image, beauty, body issues into one confined space. She also expresses her unwillingness to be confined into certain spaces by these issues (Zamantungwa, 2012).

Although there seems to have been several displays of appreciation for fat bodies, they don't seem to have had the impact which the Body Positivity Movement has had with regards to facilitating the visibility of fat women in spaces they wouldn't be recognised in.

The rise of the Body Positivity Movement in South Africa led to the emergence of young activists such as Lesego Legobane, known as "ThickLeeyonce" on Instagram. Lesego is a plus- size model, a photographer, a digital content creator and a body-positivity influencer. She is known for her outspokenness and confidence in speaking about her body and how comfortable she is with existing in it. She also encourages other women to embrace their bodies regardless of their shapes and sizes. She also has a YouTube channel where she documents her life experiences as a plus-size, Black South African woman and has become a role model in her own right. She also has a clothing store, Lee-Bex, which caters specifically for plus-size women (Gitonga, 2019). Lesego has become a very important representation in mainstream media for Black, plus-size South African women through her addition to popular international design house, Calvin Klein as a model.

Another activist, South African award- winning stylist, digital creator, and former advertising prodigy Yoliswa Mqoco recalled in an interview with Yaa Addae how as a child, she didn't realise she was a fat child until she actually started going to school. She

adds that she didn't really even realise that she was different from everyone else until people would point it out to her. She continues to reflect, “It's hard being a dark-skinned woman. It's hard being a fat woman. And of course, it's hard being a Black woman and then, of course, being a gay woman. So, I have to deal with all of those things and sometimes all at the same time, and it gets really hard sometimes, but I wouldn't have it any other way.” Yoliswa envisions a South Africa where regardless of gender - everyone feels safe in their bodies and can live peacefully on ancestral lands (Addae, 2021). She is one of the few Black South African fat women who have collaborated with international brands such as Revlon, Lancôme, Dior and Yves Saint Laurent. She was also awarded the 2022 Glamour Women of the Year for Fashion Game Changer.

Looking at the Body Positivity Movement and its impact, it seems to aim to create a platform for fat women of colour to be acknowledge and hopefully, respected regardless of the size of their bodies which would then allow these women the opportunities to showcase their capabilities in other aspects such as intellectually, for example. It also provides insight into the importance of Liberation Movements in fighting systems of oppression, which subsequently humanises victims of oppression, even though it’s just the humanisation of one aspect of their identities- in this case, their bodies.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The guiding framework for the study was drawn from the Black Feminist Thought and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology. Within the Black Feminist Thought framework:

Black women utilise principles to authenticate their knowledge assertions, drawn from the collective wisdom forged through the sharing and safeguarding of their experiences across history. Further, lived experience serves as a fundamental measure of significance, while dialogue functions as a means to evaluate knowledge assertions. Moreover, the principles of personal accountability and the ethics of care are inherent within the process of validating knowledge, underscoring a commitment to ethical standards and compassionate consideration (Morton, 2020).

The ethics of personal accountability means being responsible for one's knowledge claims, which opens up evaluation of that person's character, values, and ethics. On the other hand, the ethics of care involve three components: personal expressiveness, which values individual uniqueness within Black communities; emotion, which shows the speaker's belief in their argument; and empathy, the ability to understand another's experience by

seeing oneself in their shoes. Dialogue plays a crucial role in examining and validating ideas through conversation with others (Morton, 2020).

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology seeks to challenge established knowledge and assumptions in educational research by centering on the knowledge acquired by Black women, while also considering the intersectionality of their identities. It acknowledges that while individuals are diverse, they share a common spirit that imbues them with inherent value and validates their truths when expressed (Morton, 2020).

The internet can be used as an example of how Black women are either misrepresented or underrepresented. When one searches for professional hairstyle images for women on the internet, the search returns with a lot of images of white women and seemingly bi-racial women. And when one searches for images of Black women, there are very few images of fat women.

Noble (2018) presents a thought-provoking perspective on how internet search engine results and algorithms often harbour negative biases against women of colour. Noble (2018) challenges the notion that platforms like Google provide an equitable space for diverse ideas, identities, and activities. The skewed representation in search outcomes is viewed as a societal issue, driven by a blend of private agendas favouring specific websites and the dominance of a few search engines. This amalgamation results in biased algorithms that appear to favour Caucasians while discriminating against people of colour, particularly women of colour. This can be seen as disregarding women of colour or even silencing them which can be harmful to their identities.

Considering the discrimination experienced by Black, fat women, this framework was relevant to the study as it assisted in allowing for gentle but purposeful inquiry into the experiences of Black, fat women in a supportive and humanising manner. The aim was to validate the lived experiences and knowledge claims of Black, fat, South African women, to respect the uniqueness of those experiences and to add to the representation of black women.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has critically engaged with existing literature to examine how fatness has been socially constructed, pathologised, and moralised through intersecting systems of Eurocentric beauty ideals, patriarchy, colonial legacies, and biomedical discourses. The review has demonstrated that dominant understandings of body size and health are not neutral, but are shaped by power relations that disproportionately marginalise Black, fat

women, particularly within contexts influenced by Western norms. Furthermore, the chapter has highlighted how the Body Positivity Movement has emerged as a counter-discourse that challenges these hegemonic narratives by advocating for body acceptance, visibility, and self-definition, while also exposing the complexities and contradictions inherent within the movement itself.

By situating the study within Black Feminist Thought and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, this chapter has affirmed the importance of centreing lived experience, dialogue, and ethical accountability in producing knowledge about marginalised bodies. These frameworks provide a critical lens through which the embodied experiences of Black, fat South African women can be understood as valid sources of knowledge rather than as deviations from dominant norms. Having established the conceptual and theoretical foundation of the study, the following chapter outlines the research methodology employed. Chapter Three details the research paradigm, design, participant selection, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations that guided the inquiry into the impact of the Body Positivity Movement on the self-image of Black, fat women in South Africa.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to explore the impact of the Body Positivity Movement on the self-image of Black, fat South African women. It details the research paradigm, design, and qualitative approach that guided the study, as well as the sampling strategies, study context, and participant selection. The chapter further describes the data collection methods and analytical procedures employed to access and interpret participants lived experiences, with particular attention to ensuring rigour, credibility, and ethical integrity. Through this methodological exposition, the chapter demonstrates how the chosen research approach aligns with the study's theoretical frameworks and research objectives, thereby providing a transparent and reflexive foundation for the presentation of findings in the chapters that follow.

3.2 Research paradigm

This research was conducted from a social constructionism paradigm which postulates that "the way we make sense of our world, our ideas and attitudes are informed by our interactions with the particular social and cultural context within which we exist" (Moore et al., 2017, p.475). This means we construct our own "realities" with people from our social and/or cultural context by the use of shared and agreed meanings about our world through the use of language (communication) (Moore et al., 2017). Social constructionism postulates that the way humans construct their lives is through the use of language and that language should therefore be the focus of study (Terreblanche et al., 2006).

The guiding approach of this research assisted in getting an understanding on how individuals involved in this research make sense of ideas they hold about their bodies and what kind of meanings they attached to these constructs. Understanding the realities they've formed around body image was better understood through social interaction because of the use of language and how culture and beliefs are formed and transmitted through it (Morton, 2020).

3.3 Study approach and design

The research design was that of an exploratory qualitative nature, which placed the main focus of the study on an examination and exploration, in an attempt to gain deeper insight into the meanings, individuals attach to experiences. Qualitative research includes characteristic such as having a natural setting, with the researcher being a key instrument, making use of multiple sources of data, data analysis that is inductive and an emphasis on the participants' meaning (de Vos et. al., 2011). This research design was relevant for this particular study because the aim was to explore the experiences of young, Black, fat, South African women regarding the ways in which the Body Positivity Movement affect their self-perceptions and their body image ideals. A qualitative research approach was highly relevant due to its ability to capture rich, contextualised, and diverse experiences. It allowed for a deeper understanding of the personal, cultural, and social dimensions of body image and self-esteem, which were essential for comprehensively understanding the movement's impact on this specific demographic.

A non-directive and unstructured approach were applied because the aim was to explore from the participants' perspectives and to contribute to existing literature.

3.4 Study setting, study population, sampling and sample size

The population group for this study was sought from Black, Fat South African women from various cultural backgrounds. The types of non-probability sampling techniques that were used were Purposive sampling and Volunteer sampling. Purposive sampling was used because of the specific demographics of the sought participants. Volunteer sampling was used because it suggests that people who participate willingly are normally more motivated to be part of the study (de Vos et al., 2011). Although the youth policy in South Africa defines the youth as persons from the ages of 14-35, participants consisted of nine, black, fat young South African women from the ages of 26-32 years taking into consideration that autonomous informed consent is needed from the participants themselves. To be considered as fat, participants had to have a dress size of 38-52 (12-26 UK sizing)/ Body weight that is 70kg-130+kg. Participants were recruited and interviewed until saturation of data is reached. Participants were contacted through the social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp through an invitation brochure which contained all relevant details of the study and contact details of the researcher. The use of a virtual space such as Microsoft Teams was utilised as physical access was limited because participants were in

different provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape, Free State and Limpopo. Four participants were from Gauteng, two from Western Cape, two from Free State and one from Limpopo.

Considering that data was collected through an online medium the following was employed to establish rapport:

- Showing an interest in participants' interests, motivations, likes, dislikes by engaging casual conversations before proceeding with the interviews.
- Being trustworthy and credible by always using my real names, a recognisable image and credentials.
- Maintaining contact with participants throughout the duration of the research.
- Communicating clearly in a way participants understood. (avoiding the use of slang, metaphors etc.).
- Allowing participants to express themselves freely and raise concerns where necessary.

3.5 Data collection method and procedure

The appropriate data collection method that allowed for in-depth view into the participants' responses was semi-structured interviews. Recorded Semi-structured one – one and a half hour interviews were conducted and depended on the time and availability of participants. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and depth within the scope while being organised around the particular areas of interest within this research. The interviews were guided rather than open-ended.

Interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams and permission for the recording of the sessions was sought from participants. This method of data collection was considered because of its convenience and ability to facilitate a wider reach of participants in terms of geographical location, and it alleviated logistical constraints which may have been encountered. This proposed method of conducting interviews proved to be a cost-effective method and easy to set up.

3.6 Data analysis method

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data obtained from the research. IPA, or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, serves as a framework that is used to comprehend the lived experiences of individuals and the manner in which they make sense of their personal and social worlds. The primary goal is for one to immerse themselves in the participants lived realities through facilitating an in-depth examination. The researcher strives for a profound understanding of what it feels like to undergo an experience from the participant's perspective, aiming to extract intricate details. The emphasis lies on eliciting clear descriptions that capture the emotions along with the experience, shedding light on participants' understanding and cognitive processes (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is theoretically grounded in recognising individuals as cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical entities. It operates on the notion that there is a link between people's verbal expressions and their cognitive and emotional states. Simultaneously, IPA researchers acknowledge and remain cognisant of the complexity of this connection—a recognition that individuals may encounter challenges in articulating their thoughts and emotions (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

Step by step analysis

1. Looking for themes in the first case

I drew from Smith & Fieldsend (2021) when employing the steps of the analysis and started by reading the transcripts from the interviews several times in order to develop familiarity with the content. Noteworthy responses from the participants were extracted and noted separately and emerging themes from these responses were also noted alongside the extracted responses in order to capture the essence of the content. Detailed Comments of the responses were made and they focused on:

Descriptive Comments: What was being said?

Linguistic Comments: How was it being said?

Conceptual Comments: What underlying concepts and meanings were emerging?

2. Connecting the themes

Once the emergent themes were documented as they appeared throughout the transcript, the themes were analysed in an attempt to seek connections between them and the validity of these connections was ensured by cross-referencing these connections with the

participants' verbatim responses in the transcripts. This required a clear understanding of the participants' expressions and thoughts in order to have an accurate interpretation of the themes. The themes were then documented in a manner that reflected identified clusters of themes that capture the participants' feelings, thoughts or concerns regarding the topic (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

a. Identifying Themes

- Looking for patterns and themes within the detailed notes.
- Highlighting sections of the transcript that illustrate key themes.

b. Clustering Themes

- Grouping related themes together.
- Creating a list of emergent themes for each transcript.

3. Continuing analysis with other cases

When analysing other transcripts, themes identified from other transcripts were used to identify recurring patterns. New themes that emerge were also acknowledged and documented. The aim was to identify similarities and differences in the participants' accounts. Pertinent themes which warrant priority were then decided on based on the insight gained from the analysis (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Main themes and subordinate themes were then identified.

4. Writing up

In the final phase of the analysis the identified overarching themes were used to write an account which encapsulates and reflects the meanings the participants' experiences represent. Essentially, the aim was to compile the themes identified into a comprehensive narrative account by providing detailed explanations, illustrations and nuanced interpretations of the themes. A clear distinction between the participant's original responses and the researcher's interpretations was maintained in order to preserve the participants' voices (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). A detailed narrative for each theme was written, integrating quotes from the transcripts to support the analysis. The themes were interpreted and their significance and how they relate to the research question are explained. Similarities and differences in themes across all participants were examined. Patterns and divergences were noted to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

3.7 Ensuring Rigour

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3.8 Ethical considerations

It is crucial to be guided by ethical values when conducting research that involves participants as you do not want to infringe upon their rights. Therefore, prior to the commencement of the study, ethical approval was obtained from the UNISA Ethics Committee and participants were given informed consent forms in order for them to agree fully knowing what the study is about and what was required of them. In accordance with the researcher's ethical responsibilities as well as for the protection of the rights of the research participants, the following ethical principles were included, discussed and were adhered to during the duration of the research study: Beneficence and Non-maleficence, Voluntary participation, Informed consent, Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality.

3.8.1 Beneficence and Non-Maleficence

"The fundamental rule of social research is that no harm should be inflicted on participants" (de Vos et al., 2011, p115). To safeguard participants and minimise any potential discomfort, I thoroughly informed them about the possible impact of the research beforehand. This includes providing clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Additionally, ensured that participants have the opportunity to ask questions and express any concerns they may have. By prioritising transparency and open communication, I aimed to create a supportive and respectful research environment that respects the well-being of all participants (de Vos et.al., 2011, p.115). Anticipating that participants may experience intense emotions during interviews, I ensured that I was prepared for a range of reactions, including crying, anger, difficulty regaining control, or sudden topic shifts. In such situations, I implemented a 'bailout' protocol, which involved transitioning to factual questions, taking a break, or suggesting a resumption of the interview at another time. This approach allowed me to navigate sensitive moments and prioritise the well-being of participants. I also employed self-reflexivity which was also taken into supervision throughout the duration of the research.

3.8.2 Voluntary participation

Participation was voluntary at all times, and I took cognisance of the possibility of participants thinking they are somewhat obliged to participate and therefore reminded them of

their full autonomy in determining their participation in the study (de Vos et al., 2011).

3.8.3 Informed consent

Participants received comprehensive information about the study, including its goals, procedures, expected duration of involvement, potential benefits, drawbacks, and risks. They were also be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, participants were assured of the credibility of the research and provided with contact information for any questions or concerns. This transparent communication ensured that participants could make informed decisions about their involvement in the study while prioritising their safety and well-being (de Vos et.al., 2011). Participants received thorough and accurate information about the study, ensuring they fully understand its details. This empowered them to make voluntary and informed decisions about their participation. Once informed consent was obtained, I handled signed consent forms with discretion and stored them appropriately. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions both before and during the study, ensuring ongoing clarity and understanding throughout the research process (de Vos et al., 2011).

3.8.3.1 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

I prioritised participants' right to privacy, allowing them to control when, where, to whom, and to what extent they reveal their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. I safeguarded their privacy and identity as necessary, ensuring that their information is handled confidentially. Participants were informed of the measures taken to protect these principles, reassuring them of their privacy throughout the study. (de Vos et al., 2011). In consultation with the participants, pseudonyms were used and they were informed that their data would be kept on a password protected laptop and destroyed when no longer needed. A separate recording device was utilised in addition to the Microsoft Teams recording function and the recording device was stored in a safe.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework that underpinned the study, detailing the research paradigm, qualitative design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and analytical approach used to explore the lived experiences of Black, fat South African women. By situating the study within a social constructionist paradigm and employing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the chapter has demonstrated how the research design

was intentionally aligned with the study's aims and theoretical grounding, allowing for a nuanced and ethically grounded engagement with participants' narratives. The methodological choices described in this chapter provide the foundation for understanding how meaning was generated from the data. The following chapter therefore presents the findings of the study, detailing the themes that emerged from the analysis and illuminating how participants make meaningful sense of their embodied experiences and engagement with the Body Positivity Movement.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This interpretative phenomenological analysis explores the lived experiences of fat, Black South African women regarding body image and the impact of the body positivity movement on their self-perception. The analysis draws from in-depth interviews with participants who shared their personal journeys with body image, beauty standards, and self-acceptance.

The study employed semi-structured interviews with participants who identified as fat Black South African women of varying body sizes. Interviews focused on personal experiences, beliefs about bodies, and encounters with the body positivity movement. The analysis follows IPA principles of examining individual experiences while identifying shared themes across participants.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Superordinate Theme 1: The Evolution of Body Image Consciousness

4.2.1.1 Subordinate Theme 1.1: Childhood Innocence to Adolescent Awareness

Participants described a common trajectory from childhood body acceptance to adolescent self-consciousness. One participant reflected on how external comments during school years created awareness of their body as "different". This shift from unconscious acceptance to hypervigilance about body size marked a critical developmental moment for many participants. Two participants recounted their detailed experiences as follows:

"Now when I was growing up, my mom would always tell me that, "you know, your body is beautiful, you are beautiful", but I would always realise that, Wait, I think I'm advancing more than my peers 'cause. I'd have like big boobs….. I'd start wearing, like, a bra before my peers knew what it was so…

My definition of a body type didn't matter because I'd be like, "why do I have? Why do I have boobs but my peers don't?" And you know, boys would normally go for my peers than

they would for me. So I would always think, OK, maybe my body is not what people would look at as beautiful, but they would look at, you know, people with smaller boobs, thin waist, curves, you know, a small, petite body, but not as much as mine. So, I did carry that notion that a beautiful body is supposed to be small. It's supposed to have small boobs, you know.
Yes, curves can be there, but not as much as I had, you know, thin waist… you're supposed to be short, shorter than the guy (in romantic relationships). And even in my way of relating to people, I'd always be, you know, behind the screen to the beautiful girl that had that body so, I didn't really speak much, I didn't really shine much like my other peers that had like, you know, the smaller body" (Donna)

"Growing up, as I think, in my family, and as much as we're all like, big in my family… all my aunts, all my cousins, and the only person that's slim in my family is my younger sister. But I was overweight, like, more than everyone. So, growing up, I remember this one time we were at the beach and I was sitting in the car. I think I was… I was… I wanted to drink water or something but this guy came to me and he was like, he wanted my number and things like that. And I was telling him that I'm 15, like, you know, 15…. So, you know… And then my brother had to tell him that, 'No, this is a child, it's just that… it's just the body

Yeah, so I've had to, like, wear things to cover myself, like long skirts, big t-shirts like… just big clothing to cover my body 'cause I didn't like the way my body was. I didn't like how tight clothes fit on me or how, as my mom would put it that, 'oh, that skirt shows all your imperfections', things like that" (Lunga)

"It's definitely social media, and you know, I'd say in high school or as a teenager you're thinking, 'If I look like this, boys will like me but if I look like this… or I will only fit in with a certain group of friends if I am a certain way'. So, yes, definitely social media, peer pressure, yes" (Lesego)

"When I was young I was an obese child, so people always had comments. People were just giving random advice to my parents about diet and stuff.
Then when I was in, like, High school, I was thinner. I was never… I've never been thin, thin but I was thinner than what I am now. And then when I went to Varsity, I gained the

weight back.
It affects someone's self-esteem. You start thinking, 'am I normal? Should I lose weight? Things like that"(Thuto)

"As much as I was not a big girl growing up, I was just always body shamed, firstly for being too skinny and then leading up to like early adulthood, my early 20s, when my body started taking shape and form, my mom, in particular, also body shamed me, I think up until now, but then now I don't internalise her comments.

Where like, you know, she'd always have a comment like coming back home from varsity that "you look so big, why are you now so fat? Look at your belly blah, blah blah blah." And even after I had my son, I think after I had my son, it just became worse. Where at every point and turn, or whenever I'd meet my family, there'd just be like negative comments about how I looked, how big my tummy is, I need to do something about my weight and you know I'd always get tips or some sort of pills.

I actually still have most of them currently in my house, like from my mom that she'd order, like, "take this. Take that. It's gonna help you and all of that."

So I think in our society, like, it's just really always been a thing to like body shame women and thinking about it now, for whatever shape or form if maybe your body wasn't as perfect as I don't know, Halle Berry's body, Mariah Carey's body, or whomever that people have always looked up to when it comes to the perfect body shape, then it would always be a problem"(Nthabi)

It can be clearly noted that the transition experienced by participants often occurred through specific incidents - comments from peers, family observations, or media exposure that suddenly made participants aware of their bodies as objects of judgment. This awareness frequently coincided with puberty and increased social interactions, creating lasting negative impacts on self-perception. The lived experience of being in a larger body was often marked by constant defensiveness against societal judgments about health, beauty, and worth. Feelings of being scrutinised from a young age, with their bodies becoming sites of public commentary rather than personal agency were highlighted.

4.2.1.2 Subordinate Theme 1.2: University as a Space of Transformation

Multiple participants identified university as a pivotal period for reconceptualising body image. The exposure to diverse body types and perspectives challenged previously held beliefs about beauty and acceptability. University environments provided opportunities to witness confidence across different body sizes, disrupting narrow beauty ideals internalised during adolescence. Participants shared their experiences as follows:

"But obviously now that I'm older, I and I was exposed to body positivity, you know, on social media and other people around me, especially in varsity, where you'd…. you'd find people my age with my body type wearing whatever they like and whatever they want, and it would actually look good on them. I think it was… was it 2020?

I think it was in 2022 and it happens all the time because I…. at home…. like even now, like I'm wearing leggings because I'm at Res and just studying and whatever. But I'll never wear my leggings like, outside Res because I feel like I don't know. I just feel a bit exposed in a way" (Lunga)

"Back then, you definitely had to be slim.

You had to be slim, with a little bit of butt so that everything would good on you. But I think as… as I grew up, I think all of this changed in varsity where I got to meet a lot of different people. And yeah, so before it was definitely different.

Now I… I basically don't care much" (Lesego)

"Definitely growing up, being thin, being light in complexion was like the body. And then there was a time where having like nice bums… like pop up, like a round bum…. having bums also like was like the "it" body so…..

Having a flat stomach and having like bums and curves was the body but I think where I grew up, now that I think of it, like, having a thin figure…. looking your age. So, looking your age and being thin was like the figure and then maybe…. Like I know in varsity, late high school, it was having a nice figure like a nice bum, flat stomach, you know, light in complexion.
I know you're not talking about complexion, but I feel like it also is intertwined with self-image" (Zwonaka)

"Body image issues for me started like when we were in varsity and I don't know why, but i t ' s something that I like, you know, reflecting as you're older. I realised that this was actually a problem where I was surrounded by yourself and people that were basically not as skinny as I was and this actually impacted me quite a lot and I realised it like at my big age.

Because, like, I never felt beautiful enough because I was too skinny.

Like skinny in the sense that, like I didn't have a voluptuous body, the curves and at the time because of how tiny I looked or felt.

I always felt that like clothes didn't suit me, and even when we'd go out like I'd feel like, you know what this like, let's say this outfit isn't sitting nicely on me like I imagine if I had more meat, blah blah blah.

Those are thoughts that always crossed my mind, but in all honesty, I never did anything about them.

I realised all when I was older that it actually like impacted me negatively like in some way or the other that I was never……. from that point like up until now I'd say I've never been

*happy with my body. And I think for me what would be like a perfect body, would definitely be me without a belly *laughs*"* (Nthabi)

It is noteworthy that the university period seems to have often marked the beginning of questioning societal standards for participants which lead to them developing more nuanced understandings of beauty and health. Participants described university as offering both challenges and opportunities for body image development as can be seen in the case of Nthabi where although she existed in a thinner body, she still experienced struggles with her body, when she got to university and experienced feelings of inadequacy and not feeling conventionally beautiful which didn't change as she put on some weight because she still got comments which impacted her self-perception negatively. Whereas in the case of Lesego and Lunga it is notable how university offered a different perspective which liberated them from prescribed body ideals. We also see how Muni brings in complexion as part of self-image, which brings in the idea of the implication of colourism, which is a function of Western beauty ideals.

4.2.2 Superordinate Theme 2: Cultural Tensions and Colonial Influences

4.2.2.1 Subordinate Theme 2.1: Traditional African Values vs. Western Beauty Standards

Participants articulated a clear tension between traditional African beauty ideals that celebrated fuller figures and contemporary Western-influenced standards promoting thinness. Participants shared their opinions as follows:

"Well, I've always understood that the beauty standard says very slim, thin women, so to say, are beautiful and beauty standards, or the acceptable beauty standards, so to say. But then, I think, for me that has actually not been the case.

I don't know if it's because it's my personal preference not to be thin or slim. Which actually going deep into it, I don't know the core of that like where it comes from, where that preference stems from, but also I think in Africa, we have sort of like a different beauty standard when it comes to women.

Maybe that's how I have grown to understand a thicker body to be a more beautiful, or an acceptable body.

I mean specifically in my culture, the Zulu culture, if you're slim, it's not a good thing. You have to be curvaceous. .... I do consider myself to be quite a thick woman, so to say..... so to a great extent it does qualify me..... to be umfazi (a woman), as they say. But I've realised that also.... the whole thing of "curvaceous, is not the entire body being maybe like let's say size 36 and above.

It's like you need to have a flat stomach and then you have hips and a big bum. And I think that's what has been pushed to be the beauty standards and I think that's how in Africa. I think that's how I've grown to understand a beautiful body..... Flat stomach, Big bum and voluptuous hips" (Gugu)

"I feel like it's very unfair because who gets to decide what size, especially for African people..... like I've never been to a place where, like there's always been a thin person, if ever, in African countries or in an African region we are always looking, you know, for bigger curves, bigger boobs, bigger... you know.... everything big.

But now when we are big, because genetically, that's who we are and that's what's been praised before with our mothers and everything. Why is it now a problem that we have to be like, skinny, skinny, skinny? Then you become skinny, then you go get a BBL (Brazilian Butt Lift) . So there's no winning in this body thing. So that's why that's what I meant to say. That you have to have your own standard of beauty" (Donna)

It can be inferred from the participants accounts that they have an awareness of how African cultures historically associated larger body sizes with cultural definitions of femininity which are health, wealth, fertility and beauty, contrasting sharply with current thin-body preferences which seem to have also influenced their views on acceptable body ideals as can be seen in Gugu's account where although she's of the opinion that a bigger body size is her preference, the body seems to require a smaller waist, which is

characterised by a “flat stomach” as she states. It is also quite noteworthy how western standards cause significant discomfort for Donna where she voices the unfairness of how western standards impose themselves of individuals who are genetically predisposed to having larger bodies.

This cultural conflict created internal struggles as participants navigated between ancestral values and modern beauty expectations. The shift toward Western standards was recognised as connected to broader colonial influences on African societies.

4.2.2.2 Subordinate Theme 2.2: Reclaiming Cultural Identity Through Body Acceptance

Some participants described the body positivity movement as offering a pathway back to more traditional African values around body acceptance where larger bodies are the norm and deserve to be embraced and accepted even by the participants themselves. This can be seen in their articulations below:

“Well, I feel like it helped me, because I used to be smaller and now I'm classified as a plus size w o m a n .

So I feel like it's benefited me because I thought about it only in that aspect of being a plus size woman and plus size women can be free. Like, I feel like, 'cause…..

I don't think my style has changed even though my weight has.

So I feel like even though I have adjusted the way that I dress because of my weight, but I feel like I'm not restricted by it.

So I feel like, now I think it might have a bigger impact, you know, including my skin tone and just letting myself off the hook about those comparisons and those socialized… wanting to be lighter or lighter than I am…. Just being yourself as a Xhosa woman” (Luyanda)

“I think social media helped…You know…. people like us to see ourselves as normal. I think it's good in that when you are this size and you're not ready 'cause like, losing weight is hard. So if you're not ready….. if you're not ready yet, the movement can help you, like be comfortable in your skin for now while you're not ready yet to start losing weight, and like it's not like eventually we're all gonna be thin.

Some of us are gonna be, like, fat forever because of our genetics as black people" (Thuto)

From the participants' responses we can deduce that the movement provided a sense of comfort with changes the female body goes through along with acceptance and a newfound love for existing in a larger body. The movement also seems to have provided language and community for rejecting Western beauty imperialism and embracing culturally rooted perspectives on body diversity, wherein larger bodies are perceived as normal, acceptable and beautiful.

4.2.3 Superordinate Theme 3: The Transformative Power of Body Positivity

4.1.3.1 Subordinate Theme 3.1: From External Validation to Internal Acceptance

Participants described profound shifts from seeking external approval to developing internal validation systems. The body positivity movement facilitated this transition by providing alternative narratives about worth and beauty. One participant noted how the movement helped them accept and love their body, leading to increased confidence and self-expression:

"There was a point that I went to gym and…. but that was before COVID but going to gym at the time I think it was just maintaining the current body that I had in 2019. And then COVID came and then it interrupted that.

But I still maintained my size and I think a year later that's when I picked up a bit and since last year I picked up (weight) quite a lot.

And I'm not too happy about it, but it's not like I'm actively doing something to lose weight. I'll just complain but I'm not doing anything to actively lose weight and then with the body positivity, it's a matter of, you know, what, even in your current size, though you might not be happy with it, but you can still look good, you know. The world is already shaming you with regards to you being fat, so you don't have to do that to yourself. Like, you can still go to a store get a nice outfit and look good.

So yeah, but I know personally like I'm saying I still have that battle that, "Oh, ok, I'm not entirely happy with my size, I'd want to lose weight".

But also at the same time I'm like "it will happen. It's not.

It's not a priority to lose weight". (Moleboheng)

"I think for me the body positivity, like it came out like… it taught me that I'm normal. Like I'm normal 'cause you never used to see like chubby people, being cast in advertising things such as underwear. Things like that.

Yeah, like, I feel like for me came off like OK, I'm normal like there are other people like this.
It's not a disability or like there's nothing wrong with me, but in the same breath I really don't think like….I feel like we should also be health conscious." (Zwonaka)

The transformation participants underwent involved learning to define beauty and health personally rather than through societal metrics. Although participants are may not be completely satisfied with how their bodies look as seen in Molebogeng's account, where the movement seems to have offered a sense of acceptance with her weight gain and no sense of urgency to lose the weight because she can still look beautiful at her current weight. The movement allowed participants to achieve normalcy pertaining to their bodies while also not disregarding their health as can be seen in Zwonaka's experience. We can therefore see how participants developed more flexible, individualised concepts of attractiveness and wellness.

4.2.3.2 Subordinate Theme 3.2: Clothing, Confidence, and Self-Expression

Multiple participants connected body positivity to changes in clothing choices and self-presentation. The movement enabled wearing previously avoided clothing styles, representing tangible expressions of increased self-acceptance. These changes in dress reflected deeper shifts in self-perception and willingness to occupy space confidently.

"And you know sometimes when you've gained weight you get like this thing of like, "I don't really know how to dress for my body anymore."

I think me, I get help from like Instagram.

If I want to go somewhere I just search like what are people wearing that are the same size as me." (Thuto)

"So growing up, you'd find that you don't have a size to a certain, like, clothing item. or you're made to feel bad about the way that you look or, people, like older men will…… I remember this one time we were at the beach and I was sitting in the car. I think I was. I think I was….. I wanted to drink water or something.

But this guy came to me and he was like, he wanted my number and things like that. And I was just telling him that I'm 15(years), like, you know, 15 so.

So you know, and then my brother had to tell him that, "No, this is a child, It's just that…. it's just the body". Yeah, well, so.]

Yeah, I've had to, like, wear things to cover myself, like long skirts, big t-shirts like…. just big clothing to cover my body 'cause I didn't like the way my body was,

I didn't like how tight clothes fit on me or how, as my mom would put it, that "oh that skirt draws all your imperfections", like, things like that.

But obviously now that I'm older, I and I was exposed to body positivity, you know, on social media and other people around me, especially in varsity, where you'd…. you'd find people my age with my body type wearing whatever they like and whatever they want and it would actually look good on them" (Lunga)

"With being plus size….. and the fact that also the market now…. there's an open market for plus size women, you know we have plus size models.

So yeah.

It makes things a bit better" (Moleboheng)

It can be inferred that the participants seem to have had limited ways of self-expression through clothing before being exposed to the movement. They seemed to have had the perception that larger bodies need to be covered up as in the case of Lunga. There has always been limits in terms of ways of dressing which are deemed stylish for larger bodies. However, the movement seems to have exposed the participants to the ability to express themselves differently through clothing as can be seen in Thuto's case. This ability also seems to have brought a certain level confidence and freedom which is inspired by seeing individuals with similar body types occupying mainstream media and the fashion industry, as illustrated by Moleboheng's response.

4.2.4 Superordinate Theme 4: Health Redefined

4.2.4.1 Subordinate Theme 4.1: Beyond Appearance-Based Health Metrics

Participants developed more sophisticated understandings of health that transcended weight and appearance. Health became associated with lifestyle factors, mental wellness, and functional capacity rather than body size alone. Lesego emphasised that "health is more about a lifestyle than a look, emphasising flexibility, activity, and a balanced diet", and she further elaborates below:

"So, I think for me it's flexibility and being able to be active without feeling like you're dying.
And also being cautious of what you eat, but at the same time not depriving yourself of things that make you happy. It's definitely a lifestyle I'd say…. and with no pressure…. It's a lifestyle with no pressure.

I think it's what I'm living now.

I go to the gym, but if I can't, I can't. I'm losing weight at my own pace.

Nothing is pressuring me…. not social media or gym influencers or maybe wanting to look like someone. So, for me it's definitely a lifestyle and choosing what I eat, making sure that I enjoy it the way I want to enjoy it. Yeah" (Lesego)

Another participant shared her views on health:

"Right now, I definitely think that health is taking care of myself. So eating right, you know, exercising.

In terms of beauty, I just feel like it's always… it's in the eyes of the beholder. It's like how you feel, like, I feel like beauty is how you feel.

It's not like how you look. So right now, like this week I've been really eating right and everything. So I feel great, I look great, you see? I'm dressed great, I'm fine, like I feel comfortable.
Yeah, that's what I feel" (Zwonaka)

From the participants' views on health seem to encompass several factors instead of being reduced to physical appearance only. What is most noteworthy is how health is now viewed from a personal perspective. Participants have come to understand health as a personal journey.

4.2.4.2 Subordinate Theme 4.2: Mental Health as Central to Wellbeing

The integration of mental health into health definitions represented a significant shift. Participants recognised psychological wellbeing as equally important to physical health, challenging medical models that prioritise weight over mental wellness. This is articulated in the excerpts below:

"Honestly, a healthy body for me isn't necessarily physical, you know. I think it's it's…..

I think I focus more on mental health.

With the BMI, for example, I think we are aware that it's not necessarily body shape that constitutes as healthy, but a lot of factors like your height, your age and all that. But I think for me personally, especially as someone that has struggled with my body even throughout being slim and being on the thicker side now.

I think I've always thought myself to be thick, and I think that I was unhealthy. So I've always been of the opinion that my body has always been an unhealthy body because I think of, I would say, body dysmorphia, because looking back at my pictures and seeing how slim I was back then.

I know that at the time I felt bigger than I looked and I think that was unhealthy. And right now, knowing that I'm bigger than I was before and how I still felt bigger than I was, back then, it makes me feel even worse.

So I think that's unhealthy." (Gugu)

"I've had like some challenges mentally and I tried to walk.

As of…. and like it's…… it benefits me in that I'll be healthier, I'll be more energetic and for my mental health" (Thuto)

It can be inferred from the abovementioned responses that participants recognise mental wellbeing as a significant part of health and wellbeing which they need to prioritise to ensure that their overall functioning is maintained, as can be seen in Gugu's response. We also see how physical activity can be applied to improve and maintain mental wellbeing instead of if being used for weight loss as Thuto shared.

4.2.5 Superordinate Theme 5: Community and Isolation

4.2.5.1 Subordinate Theme 5.1: The Necessity of Supportive Communities

Participants emphasised the critical importance of supportive communities in maintaining body positivity. Negative comments from family and friends were identified as major barriers to self-acceptance. Conversely, supportive environments enabled sustained positive body image. Donna's narrative below offers insights:

"There's still some, some things that can be done to the movement that can make it better. Translating it from it being a media thing to it being, you know, a reality thing. Because the people….. yes, we can post pictures, yes, we can do #bodypositivity, just like we do with hair but if it's not outside of the media space it won't really have an effect, because what about those that don't, you know, have all the social media?

If the mainstream media itself is still showing people that are very thin, as fat and every single one that loses weight is now bashing, you know, other people and, they were still part of the body positivity, you know?..... And then they lose weight, and then all of a sudden you know they bash the same body positivity to say "no, you are just fat, please lose weight.

So there's still a lot to be done in that movement.

It's a beautiful movement, yes, but I don't think that it has reached its height, the way it should have been, especially in universities actually. I mean, they had, like a lot of opportunities because if you look at the self-esteem of girls. Where are these movements in school?

Where are these movements in universities?

Yes, people do have social media, but where are these movements?

You know, physically, where are the marches?

Where are the shirts? You know, where are the…… It even goes to…. You know… there's this this girl called Tamara. I don't know if you know her. That goes around shops telling

them that they don't have her size because even though they say that it's XL (extra-large), it doesn't fit her because she's fatter than that.

So where are, like. these movements even in our stores? Because you go to a certain shop like Mr. Price, the cut is small. Like, where are these movements to find the little things that we have in reality? 'Cause not everyone is on social media, not everyone has access to that." (Donna)

Another participant noted how having a supportive family facilitated and maintained a positive body image regardless of her body size. She reported that:

"I think the reason why I've always been like that (progressive and inclusive) is because I was raised by very supportive parents

.

You know my relatives.

It's never been in like an issue.

They just, they've always loved me the way that I am, even when I say I want to go on a diet, they're very supportive of that." (Thuto)

It is noteworthy how participants highlight the importance and need for supportive communities and outreach programs in order to extend the reach of the movement to individuals who haven't been exposed to the movement and to maintain premises of the body positivity movement.

4.2.5.2 Subordinate Theme 5.2: Social Media as Double-Edged Tool

Social media emerged as both a source of body positivity exposure and potential harm. While platforms provided access to diverse body representations and body-positive

content, they also perpetuated unrealistic standards and comparison culture. It was reported that:

"Yes. And I think that's what I thought immediately when you said body positivity. That, Oh, yes. Bigger women. Fat women wearing what they want, not being restricted. Like when you say body positivity in my head, I see those ads that are like. Dove or like lingerie, and it's a bigger lady and she's just in whatever, and we're all just like you go, girl, for being so confident to wear a bikini.

It's even a problem that she's even wearing a bikini, or it should've been. But she doesn't have a problem with it. Therefore, congratulations." (Luyanda)

"And I think when it comes to body positivity, if I'm being honest I think my biggest influence in that regard has to be social media because you know, there's so much advocacy from women, from all fronts, all different types of races, life, that are promoting body positivity.
That sometimes you go through these posts, you go through these videos and you stop and you think to yourself, that, "hang on, like, why have I always thought about this about myself?", you know, like "why have I always thought that I'm not good enough? I'm actually good enough." (Nthabi)

It can be inferred from the participants' responses that while Body positivity seems to have had a positive impact on them, it also poses a threat of being scrutinised further. It is also noteworthy how being exposed to the movement on social media seems to have created a sense that body positivity is still somewhat not easily attainable and only requires brave and confident individuals.

4.2.6 Divergent Themes

While Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis prioritises finding commonalities, its idiographic nature requires the unique ways participants' experiences vary or even contradict one another to also be honoured. These differences often highlight how personal history, family dynamics, and specific cultural intersections create a unique "lived experience" of the Body Positivity Movement.

4.2.6.1 The Source of Initial Body Shame: Peer vs. Familial Impact

A significant divergence exists in where the initial pressure to conform originated. For some, the family was a "safe haven" of acceptance, while for others, the home was the primary site of body policing.

4.2.6.1.1 Divergence A: External (Peer/Media) Pressure

Thuto describes a resilient self-image rooted in a supportive home, where the pressure was purely external:

"I think for me it was mostly outside the home... My parents never made me feel like my weight was an issue. It was when I stepped into social circles or saw magazines that I felt the 'size 36' pressure."

4.2.6.1.2 Divergence B: Internal (Familial) Pressure

Nthabi and Donna, conversely, highlight how family members were the primary critics, making the shame more intimate:

"It's hard when the comments come from people who love you. They say it's for 'health,' but it feels like they are ashamed of how you look in front of their friends." (Nthabi)

4.2.6.2 Conceptualizing Health: Physical Ability vs. Aesthetic Conformity

While most participants are moving toward "Body Neutrality," they diverge on whether "health" can truly be separated from "weight."

4.2.6.2.1 Divergence A: The Decoupling of Weight and Health

Gugu views health as a functional and mental state, entirely separate from the scale:

"Health is when I can wake up and feel light in my spirit, regardless of the number. If I can go through my day without being tired, I am healthy. The size doesn't tell that story."

4.2.6.2.2 Divergence B: The Lingering Link to Aesthetics

Moleboheng, however, expresses a more "negotiated" view where she still carries the weight of medicalised standards:

"I try to be body positive, but I still have that voice saying 'size 40 is not healthy.' I struggle to fully believe I am healthy when the world says my BMI is high... it's a constant negotiation."

4.2.6.3 The Utility of the Word "Fat": Empowerment vs. Residual Trauma

My use of "Fat" as a neutral descriptor (reclamation) was met with varying levels of comfort, revealing a divergence in linguistic agency.

4.2.6.3.1 Divergence A: Radical Acceptance/Reclamation

Zwonaka embraced the term as a way to strip it of its power:

"I like that you use 'fat.' Because that's what I am. When we say 'plus-size,' we are still trying to hide. Using 'fat' makes it just a fact, like having brown eyes."

4.2.6.3.2 Divergence B: Hesitant Tolerance

Luyanda and Lunga showed a more cautious relationship with the word, seeing it more as a "loaded" term that still stings:

"I'm getting used to it, but it still feels like a slap sometimes. In my mind, 'fat' is what they yelled at me in primary school. It's hard to make it a 'nice' word overnight." (Luyanda)

4.2.6.4 Cultural Dissonance: "African Standards" vs. Global Body Positivity

There is a sharp divergence in how participants perceive the "South African" context. Some see South African culture as more accepting of "thick" bodies, while others feel it is more judgmental.

4.2.6.4.1 Divergence A: The Protective "African Aesthetic"

Zwonaka reflects on the traditional appreciation for curves:

"In our culture, being 'thick' was a sign of being well-kept. It's the Western influence that made us hate our hips. I find comfort in that African part of me."

4.2.6.4.2 Divergence B: The "Double Burden" of Standards

Lesego feels that Black South African women face a "double standard" where they must be curvy in the "right places" but thin in others:

"It's not just about being fat; it's about where the fat is. You must have the big bum and hips, but your stomach must be flat. It's a South African pressure that the global Body Positivity movement doesn't always get."

4.2.6.5. Practical Application: Fashion as "Armour" vs. "Expression"

Participants diverged on whether the Body Positivity movement has actually changed their behaviour (how they dress) or just their internal thoughts.

4.2.6.5.1 Divergence A: Fashion as Liberation

Nthabi uses clothing to announce her presence:

"Now I wear the crop tops. I don't hide. The movement taught me that I don't have to wait until I'm thin to wear the clothes I love."

4.2.6.5.2 Divergence B: Fashion as Strategic Management

Luyanda still uses clothing as a form of "psychological armour," choosing outfits to minimise negative attention:

"I still dress to 'flatter.' I'm more confident, yes, but I still think about 'What can I wear so people don't stare too much?' It's about protecting my peace."

This divergence shows that while the Body Positivity movement provides a helpful "collective shield," the impact is filtered through individual traumas and specific South African socio-cultural nuances. For some, it is a radical tool for public defiance; for others, it is a quiet, internal process of survival.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of the study through the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of participants' narratives. The themes illustrate the complex, layered ways in which Black, fat South African women make sense of their bodies, identities, and self-image within a

socio-cultural context shaped by weight stigma, gendered racism, and colonial beauty ideals. The findings also highlight the transformative yet ambivalent role of the Body Positivity Movement, revealing both its empowering potential and its limitations in reshaping embodied experiences and understandings of health, beauty, and self-worth.

While this chapter has focused on presenting participants lived experiences and meaning-making processes, the following chapter moves beyond description to interpretation. Chapter Five situates these findings within existing literature and theoretical frameworks, critically discussing their implications, drawing connections to broader scholarly debates, and reflecting on the study's contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the findings presented in the previous chapter by situating them within the broader body of literature and theoretical frameworks guiding the study. Drawing on Black Feminist Thought and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, the chapter critically interprets the themes that emerged from the analysis, examining how participants' experiences both converge with and challenge existing scholarship on fatness, body image, and the Body Positivity Movement. The chapter further considers the implications of these findings for understandings of self-image, health, and embodiment among Black, fat South African women, before concluding with a reflection on the study's overall contributions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

5.2 Discussion

Guided by Black Feminist Thought, the analysis centred participants' lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge, particularly in how they interpreted and resisted dominant beauty standards. This reflected in themes such as 'Cultural Tensions and Colonial Influences'. And 'The Transformative Power of Body Positivity', which illustrate how participants actively negotiate and re-author meanings of their bodies within intersecting systems of race, gender and size.

In the digital age we live in, it is expected that young individuals would be exposed to content which might influence their perspectives on various notions. In the case of the young, fat, Black South African women who participated in this study, it has been insightful to see how significantly their self-image has been negatively impacted prior to exposure to the Body Positivity Movement. It would be assumed that fat, Black South African women would prescribe to African aesthetics as postulated by Njiofor (2018) where he states that beauty in African cultures surpasses superficial physical appearances and encompasses a broader spectrum of qualities such as good behaviour, skills, knowledge, dress code, strength and even fatness- which is often associated with fertility in women. However, from the findings, it can be seen how far and wide Eurocentric influences of physical beauty go where Caucasian features are portrayed as the beauty standard. A standard which has evidently resulted in the misrepresentation and marginalisation of women who do not fit

the portrayed stereotype (Spurgas, 2005). Participants displayed how deep Eurocentric influences of beauty run by sharing how they were initially imposed by family members. This seems to have led to a *trauma world* as identified by Sieff (2017), where marginalised individuals' identities become marred with feelings of inadequacy and being underserving of relationships. These feelings then tend to cause self-doubt, insecurity and a distorted sense of self-worth.

What emerges here is that body image is not merely about appearance; it is also about belonging, lovability, and whether one feels entitled to occupy social space without apology.

The analysis reveals body positivity's significant impact on participants' self-image, facilitating shifts from external to internal validation systems. The movement provided tools for challenging Western beauty standards while reconnecting with African cultural values around body diversity. The movement also seems to have assisted the participants in transforming the negative relationships they've had with their bodies and also assisted them with letting go of the internalised shame and negative associations they may have had with their bodies. A transformation that is necessary to allow them to be equipped to enlighten others and disrupt systems of oppression which affect other individuals in the world, as suggested by Taylor (2021). Importantly, however, the findings suggest that this shift was not absolute or complete. Rather than replacing older ideals, body positivity often coexisted with persistent insecurity, comparison, and the desire for social approval.

Participants' experiences highlight the intersectional nature of body image, involving race, culture, gender, and size. The experiences highlight how perceived proximity to the West warrants automatic respect and humanisation by others. This caused individuals to seek to maintain the privileges they get by virtue of being perceived as somewhat Caucasian. Another critical insight from the study is demonstrated by how the self-image of young Black South African women is also shaped by colourism, despite the visibility of the contemporary body positivity movement. Some of their reflections indicate that colourism functions as a deeply internalised extension of Eurocentric beauty hierarchies, wherein lighter skin is constructed as inherently more desirable, respectable, and socially advantageous. The reference to issues of skin complexion alongside overall body-image highlights the multilayered ways in which issues of body and self-image in general needs to be understood. It is critical therefore, to understand these intersections so as to have a holistic understanding of the complexities of these young women's lived experiences.

Furthermore, racialised visual cues mediate interpersonal behaviour, producing a form of conditional acceptance that is contingent upon perceived proximity to whiteness. Such encounters reinforce the idea that lighter skin in particular, grants increased social legitimacy, contributing to a form of psychological surveillance. Within the context of the body positivity movement, this reveals a significant tension: while the movement encourages self-love, acceptance, and the celebration of diverse body types, its effectiveness is mediated by pre-existing racialised and colourist logics. For young Black women situated within societies marked by colonial histories and persistent Eurocentric norms, body positivity may alleviate some pressures around size or body shape yet leave colourism—and its attendant psychological effects, largely unchallenged.

The intersection of gender, race and culture is likely to create an increased vulnerability to trauma on black women as shown by research conducted by Bartholomew et.al., (2018).

In addition to the intersectionality which makes black women susceptible to scrutiny which results in trauma, male influence came up as one of the points which causes some form of disruption in the way participants view and seek to present themselves. The pervasive influence of the masculine gaze on body image is highlighted, especially during the adolescent phase. This narrative also reveals a tension within the body positivity movement. Although the movement aims to promote self-acceptance independent of external validation, the participant's behaviour suggests that the perceived desire of masculine observers may continue to influence how women evaluate their own attractiveness. The need to be "found more appealing" underscores how gendered expectations can undermine the liberatory promises of body positivity, particularly for young Black women navigating multiple layers of aesthetic and social pressure. This illustrates how body image remains relationally negotiated and deeply embedded in cultural scripts surrounding desirability. This demonstrates, how the stance adopted by socially and culturally dominant men—particularly those embedded within heteronormative and patriarchal structures—regarding women's bodies suggests that men occupy the position of arbiter in determining the lovability and societal acceptability of women. Within this framework, women, especially young women and those socialised within contexts that valorise male approval or conform to restrictive gender norms, do not perceive themselves as inherently lovable. Instead, their sense of worth and desirability becomes contingent upon the internalisation of the male gaze, rendering their self-perception dependent on the approval and transformative evaluation imposed by men.

According to Lewis et.al., (1997) these attitudes could significantly exacerbate the social and economic challenges faced by heavier women by infiltrating different facets of society, impacting interpersonal relationships, professional opportunities and the overall wellbeing of women who exist in larger bodies.

The university environment emerged as particularly significant for body image development, suggesting the importance of diverse, inclusive spaces for positive identity formation. This is noteworthy because the university is often vital in cementing identity formation as it offers a sense of autonomy, exploration and different perspectives on different ideas which mostly happens through relationships which are formed in this environment and through observation of other individuals. In this study, university appears to function as a counter-space in which participants could encounter more enabling narratives of body acceptance than those available in family or school settings. This suggests that higher education spaces may play an important role in disrupting shame and broadening the cultural imagination of beauty, belonging, and selfhood.

"Not all thin people are healthy"

The redefinition of health beyond appearance represents a crucial finding, indicating how body positivity enables more holistic wellness concepts. This also indicates how the premises of the movement, which are to reject unrealistic and narrowly defined beauty standards and promoting acceptance of diverse body sizes seem to have encouraged a more inclusive and positive perspective on self-image (Lazuka et.al., 2020). Participants seem to have developed an awareness of how health goes beyond appearance and weight-loss and need to encompass holistic wellbeing. There was also insight shared into how mental well-being and unhealthy eating habits can also affect health. The participants reflections illuminate the pervasive societal expectation that thinness constitutes the ideal and healthy body, an assumption often projected onto individuals regardless of the circumstances surrounding their weight. Persistent comments about their bodies demonstrate how weight stigma continues to operate through interpersonal interactions. These comments overlook the psychological distress that could have contributed to earlier weight loss, revealing a problematic societal tendency to valorise thinness without regard for the conditions that produce it. The assertion that "not all thin people are healthy" directly challenges dominant health discourses, many of which conflate weight with wellbeing. By referencing media

representations of extremely thin individuals who subsist on nutritionally inadequate diets, the participants underscore how unhealthy behaviours can be obscured or even legitimised when they result in a socially valorised body size. This critique highlights the influence of Eurocentric health and beauty standards that equate thinness with discipline, morality, and healthiness, even in the absence of actual wellbeing. Overall, participants' accounts illustrate the tension between public perceptions of weight and privately lived experiences of health, exposing the inadequacies of appearance-based assessments of wellbeing. It highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of health—one that decouples weight from value and recognises the complex interplay between emotional, physical, and social dimensions of the body.

It Is noteworthy how the pathologisation of fatness through the colonisation and moralisation of food, weight stigma and diet culture is made evident. Food choices were used as one of the most significant lifestyle indicators, with an increased focus being placed on how these food choices can aid in improving the body's health condition and physical appearance as postulated by Askegaard et.al., (2014). It is also noteworthy how the intertwining of colonisation, moralisation of food, and weight discrimination is evident in the way societal norms around food consumption are perpetuated by the media, often resulting in feelings of stigmatisation for individuals in larger bodies, particularly women. This is also supported by Poraj-Weder et.al., (2021) who postulates that the prevailing motivation behind dietary changes typically revolves around weight loss, with individuals often prioritising this objective over other factors such as enhanced energy levels, long-term health maintenance, prevention of weight gain, and overall well-being. This fixation on weight-related goals is largely influenced by societal pressures surrounding body weight and appearance. The cultural narrative surrounding dieting tends to elevate weight loss as the primary indicator of health and success. This narrative is reinforced by media, advertising, and societal norms that often equate thinner bodies with improved health and attractiveness. Within the context of the body positivity movement, the participants' narrative reveals both the movement's necessity and its limitations. Although body positivity seeks to affirm diverse body sizes, their experiences show that external pressures to conform to thinness persist, often overriding individual health narratives.

However, it is imperative that we also recognise how the body positivity movement seems to have aided participants in redefining their ideas of health and employing a more holistic approach to health and wellness.

This suggests that healthcare approaches should also integrate participants' expanded definitions of health that prioritise mental wellness alongside physical indicators.

However, the continued need for supportive communities underscores that individual transformation requires broader social change. This is supported by work done by Freire (1998), where it's posited that when those who have been oppressed find the courage to speak out, it can lead to the development of critical consciousness. This heightened awareness has the potential to bring about radical transformations, not only allowing the oppressed individuals to humanise themselves in the process but also facilitating the liberation of those who were their oppressors. In the context of this particular study, participants raised the need for supportive communities which suggests that it is imperative that the development of critical consciousness is facilitated throughout so that there's widespread knowledge which would bring about allies for those who were previously affected by weight stigma.

The emphasis on community support indicates that effective body positivity work must extend beyond individual therapy to include family and community education.

These findings suggest that body positivity interventions should consider cultural contexts and colonial histories when working with fat, Black South African women. Educational institutions, particularly universities, represent important sites for body-positive programming.

Redefining body-image ideals

The identification of the tension between traditional African values and Western beauty standards provides crucial cultural context often missing from body positivity research. The connection to colonial influences also adds important historical perspective.

It's also noteworthy how the progression from childhood innocence to adolescent awareness to university transformation creates a clear developmental trajectory that helps understand how body consciousness evolves over time. The participants' redefinition of health beyond appearance-based metrics represents a significant finding. It is also imperative to take note on how emphasis on mental health as central to wellbeing challenges traditional medical models. This sheds some light on the impact the body positivity movement has had on the self-image of fat, Black South African women, as can be shown by the results which suggest that impact extends beyond a change in attitude to fundamental shifts in embodied experience, cultural belonging and the phenomenological structure of self-perception. Expanding the discourse on

motivations for dietary changes is essential. Encouraging a shift towards health-focused objectives, such as increased energy, long-term well-being, and prevention of weight-related health issues, can foster a more balanced and sustainable approach to dietary decisions. This entails challenging the dominant emphasis on weight loss as the sole measure of health and advocating for a more comprehensive understanding of overall well-being.

The inclination towards weight loss and engagement in weight-related behaviors is frequently driven by body dissatisfaction, which arises from exposure to unrealistic body ideals. Societal norms, perpetuated by media, advertising, and cultural standards, promote a narrow and idealised view of body shapes and sizes. Individuals exposed to these ideals may internalise the belief that their bodies must conform to such standards. Consequently, those perceiving a gap between their bodies and the idealised norms often experience body dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction often acts as a significant motivator for pursuing weight-loss strategies and adopting behaviors aimed at achieving a body closer to the culturally endorsed ideal. Addressing this phenomenon involves challenging and broadening societal definitions of beauty while promoting body positivity and acceptance of diverse body types

5.3 Conclusion

This study examined the ways in which the body positivity movement influences the self-image, digital self-presentation, and everyday lived experiences of young, Black, fat South African women. Situated within a sociocultural context still shaped by colonial legacies, Eurocentric beauty ideals, colourism, and patriarchal gender norms, the research sought to understand how these women navigate, resist, and internalise competing discourses surrounding body size, desirability, and self-worth. Through qualitative in-depth interviews analysed thematically, the study illuminated how participants negotiate their bodies in relation to both offline social expectations and online visual cultures.

The findings reveal that while the body positivity movement has created spaces for increased visibility and affirmation, its impact is neither uniform nor unproblematic. Participants acknowledged that the movement enabled them to post images of their bodies more confidently online, to embrace aspects of their appearance previously coded as undesirable, and to find communities that validate diverse forms of embodiment. However, this sense of empowerment exists alongside and is frequently constrained by persistent pressures rooted in Eurocentric thinness ideals, colourism, hetero-masculine validation, and broader systems of aesthetic hierarchy. Rather than erasing these structures, body positivity

often coexists with them, creating a complex terrain in which participants simultaneously resist and reproduce normative beauty discourses.

One of the central themes emerging from the study is the continued dominance of Western beauty standards. Even when participants actively embrace body positivity rhetoric, their narratives reveal a deep internalisation of thinness as a desirable or morally superior bodily state. Some participants described being encouraged by others to return to smaller body sizes achieved during periods of emotional distress, illustrating society's ongoing conflation of thinness with health and value. Others reflected on colourism and how lighter skin continues to be coded as beautiful, respectable, or socially advantageous. These narratives demonstrate that the movement's liberatory potential is limited when structural and interpersonal forms of stigma remain deeply embedded.

Another key finding concerns the role of the gaze—particularly the masculine gaze—in shaping self-image. Participants noted that their appearance-related decisions, both online and offline, were influenced not only by cisgender men but also by individuals who embody masculine gender expression. This extends understandings of the gendered gaze beyond heteronormative contexts, highlighting how patriarchal aesthetic expectations are reproduced even within queer relationships. Such insights emphasise that body regulation, desirability politics, and self-surveillance are structured less by the biological sex of the observer than by the cultural power attached to masculinity.

The study also demonstrates the embodied contradictions women face when navigating health discourses. Several participants asserted that weight gain accompanied healthier habits, while previous weight loss was associated with depression or restrictive eating — a direct challenge to dominant narratives that equate thinness with wellness. The participants' experiences underscore the need to decouple health from appearance and to recognise body diversity as a legitimate outcome of healthy living.

Importantly, the findings show that body positivity functions as both a coping mechanism and a form of resistance. For many participants, posting images online, engaging in affirming communities, and adopting body-positive language provided emotional relief and a sense of belonging. However, these practices did not fully dismantle the anxiety, stigma, and social policing surrounding fat Black women's bodies. This tension highlights the movement's partial but insufficient capacity to address the structural nature of body-based oppression, signalling that individual empowerment alone cannot undo systemic marginalisation.

This study contributes meaningfully to scholarship on body image, Black womanhood, and

digital cultures in South Africa. It underscores the need for localised understandings of body positivity that account for race, colonial history, gendered power relations, and socio-economic dynamics. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that while the body positivity movement has opened new avenues for self-expression and visibility, its impact remains deeply intertwined with enduring structures of inequality. For young Black fat women, body positivity offers moments of affirmation but cannot fully counter the pervasive influence of Eurocentric beauty standards, internalised colourism, and patriarchal norms. Addressing these intertwined systems requires not only individual empowerment but structural interventions, cultural change, and more inclusive representations that expand the possibilities for all bodies to be seen as worthy, beautiful, and whole.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This research represents the experiences of a specific group and may not generalise to all Black South African women. Future research could explore body positivity's impact across different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic regions within South Africa.

The role of social media in body image development warrants further investigation, particularly regarding how digital platforms can be leveraged for positive body image promotion while minimising harmful content exposure. Additionally, the research focused on social media–active young women, which may exclude perspectives from those who do not engage heavily in digital spaces. Future research could expand on these findings by including broader age groups, rural participants, or comparative studies across racial or gender identities. In addition, future research can look into conducting longitudinal studies which track body image changes over time, comparative studies with other African countries or diaspora communities and body positivity’s intersection with other social movements.

5.5 Chapter conclusion

This study set out to explore the impact of the Body Positivity Movement on the self-image of Black, fat young women in South Africa, foregrounding their lived experiences within a socio-historical context marked by intersecting systems of oppression. Through a qualitative, phenomenological engagement with participants’ narratives, the research

illuminated how dominant discourses of beauty, health, and worth are internalised, negotiated, and at times resisted. The findings indicate that the Body Positivity Movement has played a meaningful role in fostering shifts towards self-acceptance, bodily autonomy, and redefined understandings of health, while also revealing the movement's limitations and contradictions when situated within broader neoliberal, media-driven contexts.

Guided by Black Feminist Thought and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology, the study contributes to existing literature by centring Black, fat South African women's embodied knowledge as a legitimate and necessary source of insight. In doing so, it challenges the continued marginalisation of these bodies within academic, medical, and social spaces, and underscores the importance of liberation-oriented frameworks in psychological research. While the study was limited by factors such as sample size and scope, it nonetheless offers valuable implications for clinical practice, social advocacy, and future research, particularly within contexts that remain deeply influenced by Eurocentric ideals. Ultimately, this research affirms the necessity of creating spaces where Black, fat women's voices are heard, validated, and recognised—not merely as objects of discourse, but as knowledge producers whose lived realities demand ethical, psychological, and social consideration.

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College of Human Sciences_CREC

NHREC Registration # : (Rec-240816-052)
Ref #: 4111
Name: Miss Matshidiso Innocentia Mbele
Student #: 59416084

Date: 20/09/2024

Dear: Miss Matshidiso Innocentia Mbele

Decision: Ethics Approval from 20 September 2024 to 19

September 2025

Researcher: Miss Matshidiso Innocentia Mbele

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Supervisor: Professor Puleng Segalo
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The impact of the Body Positivity Movement on the Self-Image of Black, young fat women in South Africa.

Qualification: MA Clinical Psychology

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Human Sciences_CREC for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The **medium-risk application** was **reviewed** by theCollege of Human Sciences_CRECon **20 September 2024** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

2. Anyadversecircumstance arising inthe undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College of Human Sciences_CREC.

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**19 September 2025**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Additional Conditions

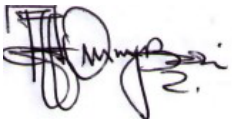
1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.

Note

The reference number 4111 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,

Prof Khatija Khan
Chair of College of Human Sciences_CREC E-mail: khankb@unisa.ac.za



Professor Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of College of Human Sciences_CREC E-mail: onyanob@unisa.ac.za

Appendix A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Date:_____

Title: **The effects of the Body Positivity Movement on the Self-Image of young, fat women in South Africa.**

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Matshidiso Mbele and I am conducting a research study for my Masters in Clinical Psychology Report at the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study titled: The effects of the Body Positivity Movement on the Self-Image of young, fat women in South Africa.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This research is being conducted in order to explore some of the attitudes and thoughts held by young, Black, fat women about the Body positivity movement in relation to their own bodies. The study is also being conducted to allow these women to share their experiences regarding the impact of the movement on their self-image.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in this study in order to share your personal experiences and views on self-image and the body positivity movement.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

This study involves audio recorded semi-structured interviews. The time allocated to these interviews will be approximately 1- 1½ hour per session. Open-ended questions will be asked, in order to allow you to fully express your opinions. There is no correct or incorrect answer. Your personal opinion on any of the questions asked is completely valid.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without providing a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the body positivity movement on young, Black, fat South African women, coupled with their views on their self-image following exposure to the movement. Therefore, taking part in this study could either expand your views on these constructs and probably change them as you think about them and decide what your attitudes are towards them or you could still stick to your views and feel as though there were no benefits. It is all subjective.

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

As this study is exploratory, possible negative consequences could be discomfort and/or difficulty answering certain questions depending on what kind of thoughts and emotions they invoke within the participant.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, know about your involvement in this research [this measure refers to confidentiality] OR your name not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give [this measure refers to anonymity]. If so, your answers will be given a code number and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting [this measure refers to confidentiality]. However, please note: Your data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Also, privacy will be protected in any publication of the information [e.g. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report].

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Electronic information will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. **Please note**: *hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software program if necessary.*

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

This is a voluntary participation study by a student researcher and therefore, no payment or any incentives will be received by participants.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Psychology, UNISA. Copy of ethics approval document can be requested from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology, UNISA.

WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Matshidiso Mbele on 078 168 5738 or e-mail 59416084@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact 078 168 5738 or email 59416084@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Professor Puleng Segalo email: segalpj@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

_____M. I Mbele_____ _____Matshidiso_____

<**researcher's signature**> <**researcher's name**>

Informed Consent

Please indicate with your signature on the space below that you understand your rights and agree to participate in the study.

I, _____<**participant's name**>, hereby agree to take part in the research project

_____

_____

<**name of project**> conducted by _____<**name of researcher**> for the fulfillment of

_____

_____

_____

<**details for which this project is completed as per discussion earlier in this document**>.

_____ _____ _____

Signature of Participant **Print Name** **Date**

Appendix B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the Interview(s).

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname.....(please print)

Participant Signature……..Date……

Researcher's Name & Surname ..... (please print)

Researcher's signature……..Date……

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions Template

The interview schedule was based on themes which emerged from the literature. The following areas were explored:

1. Previously held beliefs and ideas about bodies
2. Influences of previously held beliefs and ideas about bodies.
3. Attitudes towards health and beauty
4. Opinions and views on the Body Positivity Movement
5. Personal psychological impact the Body Positivity Movement has on Self-image and Self-acceptance.
6. Demographics: Name, age, dress size

Proof of Language Editing

Professor Emmanuel Mutambara
North-West University Business School,
Potchefstroom Campus
Contact Cell: 0745615083

10 December 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I Professor Emmanuel Mutambara has edited the Paper entitled:

THE IMPACT OF THE BODY POSITIVITY MOVEMENT ON THE SELF-IMAGE OF BLACK, YOUNG FAT WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Authored

Matshidiso Innocentia Mbele

I am satisfied with the quality of work in terms of style, grammar, and spelling. Suggestions for appropriate corrections have been made to the student. The final printing and layout REMAIN a responsibility of the student.

Regards

Professor Emmanuel Mutambara

North-West University

Email: Emmanuel.mutambara@nwu.ac.za

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