"Well Yes, Sir, I'm Fat, and Yes, Sometimes I'm a Bitch": Empowering Representations of Fat Identity in Plus-Size Women's Fashion Blogs

Chapter 3

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As previous research has demonstrated, blogging can empower women by enhancing feelings of agency and community (Stavrositu and Sundar 2012), as well as enabling financial independence (Manosevitch and Tzuk 2017). This chapter builds on my earlier work on a specific genre of blogging—plus-size fashion blogging—and the identity construction that takes place in blogs belonging to this genre (Limatius 2017; 2020a). Because of the pervasive societal marginalization of plus-size women, the opportunities for positive identity construction that are facilitated by the internet have become significant in terms of empowerment. Through investigating representations of the word "fat" in blog texts, I explore the ways in which plus-size fashion bloggers construct fatness as ordinary, reclaimed, and beautiful. In addition, my analysis highlights the deeply gendered nature of "fat," particularly in the contexts of fashion and hegemonic beauty.

In the present chapter, I study a group of fashion blogs authored by UK-based, plus-size women. I utilize methods of corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Baker 2006) to examine blog texts that feature the use

of the word "fat" as a tool for empowering identity construction. The chapter addresses the following research questions:

1. In what ways do plus-size fashion bloggers discursively construct fatness as a "neutral" or "positive" aspect of their identity?
2. How can such expressions of the fat identity empower the self and others?

Following my discussion of blog texts, I address the ways in which plus-size women can apply these practices of identity construction to other forms of online content creation, thus becoming social media influencers (Abidin 2016; 2018).

PLUS-SIZE FASHION BLOGGING AND EMPOWERMENT

In the context of the present chapter, I define a plus-size fashion blogger as an individual who authors a personal, fashion-focused blog and self-identifies as "plus-size." Even though the term "plus-size" is typically used when describing both blogs and bloggers, most of the blog authors, as well as many readers of these blogs, also identify as "fat" (Limatius 2019; 2020a). While "plus-size" is commonly used in the context of clothing and the fashion industry, "fat" has more connotations to size activism (Limatius 2019). In the present study, both terms are used in a neutral sense with no derogatory intent, following the example of the bloggers.

Typically, plus-size fashion blogs include "outfit of the day" posts where bloggers present and comment on fashion items they are wearing, as well as product reviews, and descriptions of everyday life comparable to so-called lifestyle or "homing" blogs (Jäntti et al. 2018). The aforementioned categories can also be identified in the broader fashion blogging genre; however, the marginalised position that plus-size women occupy in the field of fashion is typically visible in the discursive practices the bloggers utilize in their blog texts, as will be illustrated in the empirical analysis later in this chapter.

In order to understand the societal importance of plus-size fashion blogging, we first need to understand the stigma of the fat woman and its connections to the fashion industry and mainstream media.[1] In

feminist scholarship, women are seen as more affected by the societal stigmatization of fatness than men. Harjunen (2009, 29) connects the discrimination of fat women in particular to the objectification and sexualization of the female body, and Hartley (2001) theorizes that those subjected to male desire—namely, women and gay men—are also more likely to be subjected to marginalisation based on fatness. Regardless of gender, those wanting to appear attractive to men seem more likely to have "internalized fat-oppressive attitudes" (Hartley 2001, 67) than those wanting to appear attractive to women.

Even though fatness has not always been considered unfashionable (on the history of fatness and beauty, see, e.g., Klein 2001), in modern Western society, a fat female body is typically constructed as ugly, unattractive, and sexually undesirable (LeBesco 2004, 50). While this can be argued to be slowly changing, partly due to the increasing social media presence of the so-called body positivity movement (Sastre 2014; Limatius 2020b), mainstream fashion media is still characterised by an anti-fat mentality (Connell 2013).

In the context of the fashion industry, fatness is disruptive, as it does not conform to societal and commercial ideas of what is considered beautiful and "feminine" (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013, 278). LeBesco (2004, 50) theorizes that we tend to connect beauty to the idea of being *pure*—something that fatness, due to its indulgent nature, cannot be. Fat fashionable women thus break the beauty and fashion "rules" by simply existing—after all, it is in the very nature of fatness to cross boundaries; fat is *excessive* (LeBesco and Braziel 2001), and it takes up space (Hartley 2001). As Hartley (2001, 62) points out, this transgressive nature of fatness is also gendered: while it is acceptable for men to take up space, women quickly become viewed as "something freakish" if they are similar in size, or larger, than the average man. Because a fat woman is, by default, a deviation from the societal standard for acceptable womanhood (Hartley 2001), a fat woman who refuses to shrink and, through the practices of dressing up, makes herself more visible becomes uncontrollable. Against this background, a fat woman who blogs about fashion, publicly presenting her body as deserving of beautiful clothes in the same way as a thin woman, is renegotiating and challenging the social structures and norms that define femininity in the mainstream media (Harju and Huovinen 2015).

What, then, makes such re-negotiation of norms through fashion blogging empowering for fat women? To answer this question, we need to define what exactly can be considered empowering in this context and consider the ways empowerment can be constructed through blog writing. Due to its context-dependent, multi-faceted nature, empowerment is not easily conceptualised (Jaborooty and Baker 2017). We can, however, distinguish empowering aspects in the previous literature on the ways in which marginalised people utilize different forms of online content creation.

One feature that makes blogging potentially empowering is the fact that it allows those who are ostracised or silenced in the mainstream media to have a platform for voicing their opinions, feelings, and experiences (Jaborooty and Baker 2017; Muhtaseb and Frey 2008). Despite the fashion industry's recent efforts towards more inclusive representation, fashion imagery continues to be dominated by thin, white, cis-gendered, and able bodies (Connell 2013). Harjunen (2017, 31) notes that in neoliberal discourse, the body has become "a site of intersectional power relations that have an effect on how the body in question is valued, treated, and experienced in society." Online platforms such as blogs can be utilised to dismantle these hierarchies.

While fashion emphasizes normative beauty ideals, the mainstream media discourse on fatness focuses on whether fat bodies are "healthy" or not (Cooper 2016); obesity is described as an "epidemic," for which fat people themselves are responsible (Dickins et al. 2011). The burden placed by society on fat women is thus twofold. On the one hand, societal norms dictate that fat women cannot be healthy, and therefore cannot fulfil their duty as ideal citizens. On the other hand, they cannot be beautiful, and thus fail to be ideal women. Moreover, as Harjunen (2017, 30) states, in a neoliberal culture, the line between the beauty of the body and the health of the body has become blurred: "In the end, it is the appearance of health that counts the most."

Women's bodies have been historically policed by societal standards of ideal beauty (Klein 2001)—and at the same time, women have been punished for being invested in fashion and appearance, as this has often resulted in being labelled "vain" or "frivolous" (Tseëlon 1995). Plus-size fashion blogging is, in a way, the ultimate rebellious act against such standards, as it is excessive in more than one way. As previously stated, fat in itself indicates excess, but so does the practice

of dressing up and posing for photographs that are then posted online. Plus-size fashion blogging has made representations of happy, fashionable, beautiful, and sexy fat women widely and publicly available via the internet. Thus, it has offered plus-size and fat women tools for creating counter-discourse (Connell 2013) to both the demanding beauty standards of the fashion industry and the obesity epidemic discourse that dominates the public discussion on fatness. Plus-size fashion blogging is also influenced by social movements that draw attention to the sizeism and fat-phobia in society—namely, the fat acceptance movement and the body positivity movement (Limatius 2020b). The fat acceptance movement opposes the social discrimination based on fatness and strives for equal rights between fat and straight-sized people (Harjunen 2004; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), while the body positivity movement aims to increase the representation of different body types and the normalization of "all shapes and sizes" (Sastre 2014, 929–30).

In their work on the psychological empowerment potential of blogging for women, Stavrositu and Sundar (2012) highlight bloggers' sense of agency and sense of community. According to them, a sense of agency can be characterised as the "feeling of having a competent, confident and assertive voice" and the public nature of blogging intensifies this feeling, as it enables outside validation for the blogger's voice (Stavrositu and Sundar 2012, 371). This publicity also facilitates engaging in dialogue with others, which in turn can create a sense of community, as bloggers connect with others having similar interests (Stavrositu and Sundar 2012). Being a part of a network of plus-size fashion bloggers, as well as contributing to new representations for fat women online, link both community and agency to plus-size fashion blogging. This is also realised in the bloggers' language use. Practices such as the deliberate use of the word "fat" (Harju and Huovinen 2015; Limatius 2019) can be interpreted as asserting a voice that opposes the mainstream discourse on fatness, whereas the use of inclusive language, for example, first-person plural pronouns (Fetzer 2014), highlights the communality within the network of bloggers.

DATA AND METHODS

The starting point for the present study was a corpus compiled from twenty UK-based blogs in 2015. Altogether the corpus consists of 7,776 blog posts (3,177,959 words) and 32,737 comments (1,000,049 words) (Limatius 2019). Permission from the bloggers whose blogs were included in the corpus was requested before data collection, and the corpus is kept on a password-protected, personal server. Although the blogs were publicly available without registration at the time of collecting the data, I have chosen not to make the data public, as some of the bloggers have since removed material from their blogs. Although the main topic of all the blogs featured is fashion, these also contain personal topics. Because of this, the examples from blog posts and comments used in this chapter were chosen carefully to avoid revealing identifying information. In the present study, I focus on the analysis of textual data; as such, photographs and videos embedded into the blogs were omitted.[2] In the analysis, I use pseudonyms for the bloggers, but it is worth noting that as always with public online data, complete anonymization is not possible.

I chose to focus on occurrences of the word "fat" for two reasons. First, as established in a previous quantitative study, "fat" was used by the bloggers in the corpus frequently when describing one's own body or the bodies of other community members (Limatius 2019). Overall, "fat" was the most popular size-related body descriptor in the corpus, followed by "plus-size" and "big," whereas words such as "obese" or "overweight" were markedly less common (Limatius 2019; 2020a). Second, as previous research has illustrated, the bloggers have adopted a neutral, intentional, and in some instances "reclaimed" use of the word (e.g., Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013; Harju and Huovinen 2015; Limatius 2017). Thus, the word can be considered to have a special role within the group of bloggers. "Fat" is a polarizing term, traditionally considered an insult in the mainstream but connected to interesting new meanings within the plus-size fashion blogging and body positivity communities.

The number of occurrences of "fat" in the blog corpus investigated in this chapter was 1,867. This number includes any instances of the word in blog text titles, the main blog post text, and the commenting section, after some manual filtering of the data. In the present study, I

chose to focus only on occurrences of the word that referred to people or parts of a person's body in order to have a clear emphasis on identity construction. For example, phrases like "building a fat free gingerbread house" or "a big, fat rant" were omitted. In addition, I omitted uses of "fat" when they were a part of a proper name, including the names of blogs or clothing brands, or fictional characters, like "Fat Amy" from the movie *Pitch Perfect*. While such uses are not insignificant, in these cases it was more difficult to interpret whether the use of "fat" stemmed from a blogger's conscious choice to use that word. For this reason, I narrowed down the data to instances where the word "fat" could have easily been substituted with another term, but the participants had still chosen to use it.

To investigate how "fat" was used in the bloggers' identity construction as a marker of empowerment, I examined all relevant occurrences of "fat" as a body descriptor in the corpus and categorised them as either positive, neutral, or negative based on the discursive and linguistic context in which they were used. In some cases, this connotation was apparent from the immediate context of use, as illustrated by the examples in Table 3.1.

However, in many cases, qualitative investigation of longer passages of blog text was required. Consider the following example of negative use from Blog M: "Growing up I was always 'the fat one.'" In order to code this example as negative, one needs to be aware of the discursive and cultural connotations of being "the fat one" in a group of friends, as well as exploring the wider context around the example: the blogger describing her struggles of being body-shamed as a child.

In the next stage of the analysis, I focused on the positive and neutral uses of the word and their potentially empowering meanings. As the word "fat" has deep-rooted negative connotations in contemporary Western culture, "neutral" uses of the word can also be considered empowering in the context of the present study (e.g., Harju and Huovinen 2015). LeBesco (2004, 105) compares the use of the term "fat" to the use of "queer" as a "generic term" within communities

Table 3.1. An Example of Categorising Uses of "Fat"

Positive use	*Negative use*	*Neutral use*
"Happy, confident and fat." (Blogger A)	"I will delete shitty fat-shaming comments." (Blogger B)	"Fat is an adjective." (Blogger S)

where it is used for self-representation, highlighting the significance of linguistic choice. Through intentional, repeated use, the previously negative power of "fat" becomes less impactful and more normalised (Limatius 2020a).

The scope of this chapter does not allow for a detailed observation of the "negative" uses of "fat," but from reading through all 1,876 rows of concordance in order to categorise the examples, I gained a tentative understanding of such uses. For the most part, the negatively connotated "fat" appeared in contexts where the bloggers were referring to their past experiences, such as: "I used to think my fat body was disgusting." Alternatively, negative uses were present when recounting outsiders' attitudes towards fatness: "The idea that fat people are lazy drives me insane." It was rare for a blogger to express negative sentiments about her current state of fatness, which indicates that the plus-size fashion bloggers in the data had already embraced ideas of fat acceptance and/or body positivity. While the bloggers' discussion of the negative connotations of fatness is interesting and worthy of further exploration, my analysis in this chapter focuses on the positive and neutral representations of fatness due to their strong connections to empowerment.

After removing the negative expressions of "fat" from the data, I was left with 1,266 occurrences that could be considered either "positive" (386) or "neutral" (880).[3] Following a close reading of these occurrences, I distinguished three discourses that will be discussed in the analysis: (1) fat as ordinary, (2) fat as reclaimed, and (3) fat as beautiful. The following sections describe the findings of the qualitative analysis, illustrating the ways in which the use of "fat" reflects processes of identity construction and empowerment in the blog data. It should be noted that the data includes contributions from two groups of people: bloggers and commenters. In a previous study (Limatius 2019), I established that there were some differences between the ways the authors and commenters of plus-size fashion blogs talked about their bodies. While the three most frequently used terms ("fat," "plus-size," and "big") were the same in both groups, the authors used a broader variety of different terms. Moreover, commenters used body descriptors more when commenting on blogs that had a fat acceptance or activism focus, compared to blogs that mainly discussed fashion,

personal style, and beauty products. Thus, the topical focus of the blog likely influences the commenters' language use.

FAT AS ORDINARY

Many bloggers use "fat" in a context that highlights its role as only one aspect of their being. For example, fatness is constructed as something that does not prevent or take away from positive aspects of life, such as happiness, health, sexual pleasure, or success in work and/or studies, by Blogger I: (1) "I just wanted to really put it out there, I'm fat, I'm happy and I'm healthy along with hundreds of other amazing ladies."

Against the background of the medical stigma associated with fatness, and the idea of the "obesity epidemic" that is prominent in the mainstream media (Dickins et al. 2011; Cooper 2016), the fact that Blogger I positions "fat," "happy," and "healthy" in the same context is significant. Both happiness and health are things fat people are not "allowed" to have according to the dominant discourse on fatness, which makes describing these features as co-existing with "fat" a potentially empowering counter-discourse. The connection between empowerment and community is also present here in the mention of "other amazing ladies."

Or this comment on Blog O: (2) "Despite not studying anything like body politics for my doctorate, one of the reasons I did it was that I wanted to demonstrate to the world/people I knew/my parents that fat people (and fat women especially) could be academic and that I was capable of undertaking a PhD, particularly one in science." Examples (1) and (2) demonstrate plus-size women's active desire to make others aware of their contentment and success in life despite being fat. This desire is exemplified by Blogger I wanting to "really put it out there" in (1), and the commenter's need to prove her academic proficiency to friends and family, as well as "the world" in general in (2). By publicising success in life, the bloggers and commenters have the potential to empower others as well as themselves.

On a more explicitly linguistic level, the bloggers also discuss the meanings they attach—and have attached in the past—to the word "fat" itself. The bloggers who have embraced fat acceptance through blogging perceive "fat" to be on the same level as other adjectives,

such as "short," "tall," "brunette," or "freckled." Through such comparisons, fatness is framed as ordinary: one quality among a host of others. The fact that "fat" is merely a descriptive word that can no longer be hurtful once one "takes back" its power comes up frequently in the data. For example, Blogger D emphasizes the fact that even when another person's intention is to use "fat" in a hurtful way, those who have achieved body confidence and fat acceptance do not fear the term: (3) "You see the thing is, as body confident, fat accepting women, the notion of being called fat doesn't [faze] us."

Finally, one way of diminishing the negative power of "fat" is questioning whether being fat is truly that bad. Multiple bloggers contrast fatness with the negative behaviours they have experienced from others as fat women, often concluding that they would prefer fatness over exhibiting such behaviours themselves: (4) "I'd sooner be fat than the kind of person who finds pleasure in insulting others for the size of their bodies" (comment on Blog B). The comment in (4) highlights the role of agency in discussing bodies—becoming fat is rarely a conscious choice, although it may be presented as such in the neoliberal "obesity epidemic" discourse, but we can control the way we react to other people's appearance. Thus, the fat-shamer becomes the one who misuses their agency. Fatness, unlike offending behaviour, does not make one a bad person. As illustrated in the following section, some bloggers take this approach even further, constructing fat as good by reclaiming it.

FAT AS RECLAIMED

In contrast to diminishing the role of "fat" by constructing it as ordinary, some of the bloggers present their fatness with pride and defiance. As Gurrieri and Cherrier (2013, 281) point out, fat women can become liberated through making themselves visible in their fashion blog posts—after all, merely occupying a beauty- or fashion-focused space in a fat body is considered a boundary-breaking act. Thus, empowerment can also be achieved by highlighting fatness.

Whereas the examples in the previous section normalize fatness by portraying it as one characteristic among many other features that make up a person's identity, there are also instances in the data where fat is

intentionally emphasised. This is done, for example, through declarations of fat pride: (5) "I am fat, happy and proud!" (Blogger K). In (5), Blogger K makes a statement similar to Blogger I in (1): she lists fat along with other descriptors that apply to her. However, while Blogger I writes she is "fat, happy and healthy," Blogger K is "fat, happy and proud." From the perspective of societal acceptability, there is a difference between the two. It is one thing to be content with one's fatness and to accept oneself despite being fat, especially if one can still "justify" their contentment with being healthy, that is, not a "burden" to society. However, it is another thing entirely to have unapologetic pride in fatness. Blogger K not only accepts her fat but celebrates it.

In addition to declarations of pride, the bloggers recounted situations where they had defended themselves against bullies or anti-fat attitudes. Such anecdotes are often presented as a part of a narrative of the blogger's "journey" towards fat acceptance (see Limatius 2017) and preceded by a confession that, in the past, the blogger would not have had the courage to perform such acts of defiance, as in this example by Blogger D:

> (6) "There used be a time I would go home and cry, self-harm and it would set me off on a spiral of depression, eating disorders and drinking (no, really) but now I call people out on it, get all fat and up front with them. Some lad rode past me on a bike and shouted that I had a fat arse, I shouted back "I know, it's glorious isn't it?!"

In (6), the blogger mentions that in the past people commenting negatively on her weight would have caused her to retreat and to engage in self-destructive behaviours. However, now she responds to bullies defiantly; as she puts it, she gets "all fat and up front with them." This sentiment is echoed by several other bloggers as well—shaming a fat person who is open about her fatness and "owns it" is seen as pointless and ineffective, which is why embracing fat—both the word and its physical manifestation—is considered a powerful tool in the battle against discrimination.

Again, we can examine (6) together with a previous example, (4). In (4), it is established that existing in a fat body, yet treating others with kindness, holds more power than putting others down because of their appearance. In (6), the blogger's response goes even further—she openly states that her fat is "glorious"—taking a negatively intended

comment from a passer-by and framing it as if it had been a compliment. A similar approach is presented by Blogger A in (7): "Well yes, sir, I'm fat, and yes, sometimes I am a bitch." Just like Blogger D in (6), Blogger A describes an unpleasant encounter with a stranger: a man who drove past her shouted at her, calling her a "fat bitch." She too tells her readers that in the past, she would have "put on a brave face, but cried when [she] got home." Now, however, she merely feels sorry for the man, responding to him in an open letter on her blog, as he was "too cowardly" to stop, thus leaving her no chance to respond in the moment. The message her response conveys dismantles the power of the stranger's insult: being called a "fat bitch" is not hurtful, since it is a statement of the obvious.

Interestingly, the two bloggers in (6) and (7) describe a fairly similar situation: the verbal attack comes from a man, and the insults appear gendered. In (6), the stranger's focus on a specific body part implies sexual objectification, and in (7), the use of the word "bitch" directs the insult towards women. However, the data also includes examples of situations where women shame each other for being fat. For example, in a previous study of the same corpus, I found the bloggers discussed the body shaming that happens on the Facebook pages of women's plus-size clothing brands (Limatius 2017, 39). As Hartley (2001, 62) points out, misogynistic body norms are not always attacks against women "from the outside"—the male gaze has become internalised. As a result, a woman tends to judge and evaluate a woman's body "as ruthlessly as she expects it to be evaluated by [a man]" (Hartley 2001, 62).

Finally, although one goal of the reclaimed usage of the word "fat" is neutralizing it as a descriptor, it can also be embraced as a positive term. In example (8), Blogger K describes the love she has found for the word that so many continue to use as a derogative term: (8) "I love the word fat because it is *mine*, in that I can own it and I am empowered to use it." Thus, Blogger K does not merely remove "fat" from its negative connotations and present it as a neutral adjective like "tall" or "blonde"—she expresses *love* for it. "Fat" is something dear to her because it feels hers, and that sense of ownership is empowering.

FAT AS BEAUTIFUL

As the data for the present study consists of plus-size fashion blogs in particular, positive representations of the fat identity are also constructed through fashion- and beauty-specific discursive practices. This echoes the results of Gurrieri and Cherrier's (2013) study on Australian fat activists and "fatshion" bloggers.[4] They found that "flaunting" fatness through practices of dressing up helped the women in their data set to break away from established societal beauty norms (Gurrieri and Cherrier 2013, 289). This was achieved, for example, through wearing clothes and styles that were considered "unflattering" on larger women. Similar examples were found in the data for the present study, like this from Blogger D: (9) "Tuesday was a major fat babe day, I rocked a crop top and bikini pants at the paddling pool."

In (9), Blogger D constructs an image of a liberated fat woman by referencing the fact that she wore clothing items often considered as "not appropriate" for fat women to wear (a crop top and a bikini). She refuses to hide her fat body despite its excessive nature (LeBesco and Braziel 2001), and thus refuses to be controlled. There are several instances of such deliberate "rule-breaking" in the data. The fact that fat women are expected to dress in a certain way is often brought up, usually accompanied with encouragement for readers to also break the fashion "rules" by embracing styles traditionally considered "unflattering" on fat bodies, such as clothing with horizontal stripes, "bodycon" dresses, and brightly coloured outfits.

The use of the term "fat babe day" in (9) is also notable. Several bloggers in the data refer to both themselves and others as fat "babes" or "beauties" (see also Limatius 2017). The use of such positive, descriptive nouns underlines the fact that "fat" is meant to be positive as well. This avoids any misunderstandings in case some blog readers are not aware of the blogger's intention of using fat as a "reclaimed" term. Example (10) from Blogger H is fairly typical in the data when it comes to discussing the term "fat" and removing it from its negative connotations: (10) "I'm not afraid to say I am fat now, because it doesn't make me a bad person and I know that I, as many others too, are still beautiful!" The separation between "fatness" and "ugliness" appears important for the bloggers, both as a type of self-discovery—realizing

that being fat does not mean you cannot be beautiful—and as a way of educating outsiders about fat and the meanings connected to it.

Blogger C's statement in (11) illustrates the importance of inclusivity in fashion: (11) "After telling her how gorgeous it was, [my friend] dropped the bomb on me that this beautiful thing was from George at Asda and went up to size fat!" The fact that the item of clothing in question was available in "size fat" is described as shocking, because fat women rarely have the same options when it comes to fashion as thinner women do. By sharing her experience in her blog, Blogger C also shares with possible fat readers the information that this particular item can be found in plus sizes, thus strengthening the communal ties within the group.

Finally, Blogger P's self-description in (12) takes us back to the beginning of the analysis, echoing the idea of fat as ordinary: (12) "Cos [I'm] just a fat girl blogging her clothes!!" For Blogger P, fatness is simply one aspect of her being, just like blogging about fashion is. One describes her appearance, while the other describes her actions—but neither of them define her as a person. However, due to the beauty standards maintained by the fashion industry, and the social marginalization of fat people (especially women), these two facets of her identity cannot be fully separated. Her love for fashion is inescapably affected by her fat body, as she disrupts dominating discourses on both fashion and fatness.

In the context of seeing fat as beautiful, it should be noted that all the bloggers included in the data appeared to have already achieved some level of self-acceptance. In the future, research should also examine bloggers and other content creators who do *not* necessarily view themselves to be beautiful. For example, Sastre (2014) has previously criticised the body positivity movement for not being radical enough and focusing too much on beauty, which ties into the broader societal issue of women being acceptable only if they are beautiful. More intersectional perspectives that consider how, for example, race and disability affect the discourse on fatness and beauty are also needed.[5]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have investigated how plus-size women create potentially empowering representations of fatness through fashion blogging. However, the next step is to look at such practices beyond blogging. In recent years, many fashion bloggers have abandoned the title of "blogger," opting for "influencer" (e.g., Abidin 2016; Torres, Augusto, and Matos 2019) instead. Influencers are present simultaneously on multiple social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok. The blog appears to have been reduced from the primary channel of content creation to one part of a multi-platform network. Each platform in this network, and the interaction that takes place between them, now contributes to building a creator's personal brand.

An increasing number of bloggers-turned-influencers also benefit financially from content creation; they engage in practices of self-branding (van Nuenen and Varis 2017) across their platforms, working with brands and companies that sponsor their content. As Torres, Augusto, and Matos (2019) found, digital influencer marketing can effectively increase consumers' purchasing intentions as well as positively influencing the consumers' attitudes, provided that the influencer's personal brand is compatible with the brands they work with.

I argue that influencer marketing also has empowerment potential. Firstly, earning money from creating content such as blog posts and YouTube videos can lead to *financial* empowerment (Manosevitch and Tzuk 2017). As structures of working life change, an increasing number of people work freelance jobs, many of them involving social media production. Social media work in general is also a female-dominated field of work (Duffy and Schwartz 2018). The potential of, for example, stay-at-home mothers (see Jäntti et al. 2018) to become more financially independent and empowered through influencer work is worth noting.

Secondly, in the context of plus-size fashion blogging, influencer culture may also increase psychological empowerment (Stavrositu and Sundar 2012). New technical affordances of social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok help content creators reach a wider audience than blogs due to their algorithm-based nature. If plus-size fashion bloggers adopt a multi-platform approach to their creative

practices, they may gain more visibility and representation on social media, which in turn can empower both the creators and their followers. In my view, the next important step for scholarship is to determine how the change from bloggers to influencers affects the empowerment potential of breaking the norms of fashion and femininity online.

SUMMARY

- Fashion blogging has enabled plus-size and fat women to construct counter-discourse to the dominant discourses on fatness and fashion in mainstream media.
- Through using the word "fat" in positive and neutral contexts, plus-size fashion bloggers have also found new ways of conceptualizing fatness.
- While fatness can be characterised as ordinary, it can also be highlighted and celebrated as beautiful. Both interpretations are potentially empowering.
- Online influencer culture can create new opportunities for plus-size women to empower themselves and others.

NOTES

1. While men and non-binary people also author fashion blogs and may align themselves with the body positivity movement, the plus-size fashion blogging community is a predominantly female space.

2. I do, however, recognise the importance of multimodal approaches in analysing social media data; while this chapter does not include analyses of visual material, I am currently working on another project on the multimodal aspects of blogs, YouTube, and Instagram.

3. As negative uses still had a presence in the data, further study is needed to explore the significance of their role.

4. In this chapter, I have chosen to talk about "plus-size and/or fat fashion bloggers" instead of using the term "fatshionista" because the bloggers I studied rarely used "fatshion" or "fatshionista" themselves.

5. As the group of bloggers studied in the present chapter only included two women of colour, and focused on UK-based bloggers, it cannot be considered to represent the experiences of plus-size women from all backgrounds.

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