

'Getting fuller-figured women in the picture: from stigmatised consumers to embodied authors'

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(Signature).....*Annie Blanchette*.....

Abstract

Whilst the idealisation of extreme slenderness is widely recognised as a problematic issue, the negative portrayal of larger individuals is rarely criticised for its link with stigmatisation and problems with self-esteem. To the contrary, the representation of larger individuals in dehumanising terms – whether in news reports, advertising and research accounts – is generally regarded as a necessary means to encourage the pursuit of a ‘better’, ‘healthier’ self. However, these negative stereotypical portrayals – generally excluding the perspective and consent of those depicted – can also have adverse effects on human dignity, legitimacy and self-esteem of those thus depicted. Building on the work of fat studies scholars, as well as feminist marketing researchers, this research project seeks to contribute to the inclusion and rehumanisation of fuller-figured individuals, by involving them in the dialogue of visual and research representation. To do so, this research invited a group of fuller-figured women living in the UK and Canada, to ‘envision’, ‘model’, and ‘review’ their own self-presentations, primarily via the use of self-directed portraits, blogs, and conversations. Whilst the inclusion of their embodied perspectives is expected to contribute to humanising the representation of larger individuals – and offer a glimpse into what could be if we started considering women ‘of size’ as authors of their own depictions – it also contributes in filling a gap left by consumer researchers who have overlooked the way larger individuals make sense of their selves, bodies and well-being. As such, this research contributes to existing consumer research theories by explaining the ways individuals can envision their selves/bodies in the shadow of, but also in contrast with, the dominant marketplace promotion of slenderness. In terms of contribution, this research illustrates the relevance of therapeutic and embodied perspectives to understand the self, the body and to engage in acts of consumption. A new ‘self-nurtured’ discursive position offers challenges to the meanings generally attributed to larger individuals, and to the traditional approaches taken by consumer researchers to solve the ‘obesity crisis’. Overall, this research provides empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions to the field of consumer research. It also offers practical implications for the representation of larger individuals, and recommendations for those interested in the social marketing of health to enjoin people of all sizes in mindful acts of self-care and consumption.

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Accompanying material

Selected research images available online: <http://perspectivescurve.smugmug.com/>

Password: CurvesPhd

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Word usage

My adoption of the words 'fuller-figured' and 'fuller-figuredness' may seem rather unusual. Yet, their use is very significant in the context of a poststructuralist/feminist research project dealing with body and identity politics, and as such, requires further explanation.

Words such as 'obesity', 'obese' and 'overweight' are currently well accepted to designate individuals who are larger than the norm, in marketplace imagery, broader cultural and research discourses. Though the use of these words is perceived as normal and legitimate, it implies a medical, but also moral, problematisation of these individuals on the basis of their size, and alleged consumption behaviours. The basic premise of this research is that these terms, as well as the associated negative moral/medical representations of fatness, should be interrogated more critically. Though this categorisation is seen as a first step towards the promotion of health and adequacy for the people thus problematised, it can have equally important effects on their human dignity, legitimacy, emotional (but also physical) health and life possibilities. As such, my use of the words 'obesity', 'obese', 'overweight', but also 'underweight', is strictly with a critical stance.

In light of the problematisation of these common terms, the traditionally 'bad' words 'fat' or 'fatness' have been politically-reclaimed as 'neutral' by fat studies scholars working on size as part of identity politics, and activists working towards fat and size acceptance at the social and personal levels. 'Fatness' is sometimes used to designate higher levels of weight in certain activist and academic circles, but is also used in a broader fashion. Like others in those fields/movements, I use it to designate any weight or size above the medical or commercial 'norm', but also, mostly, as a socially-mediated subjective position – which can be experienced by people of different sizes, and with varying degrees of acceptance – as opposed to a sheer physical reality.

However, as 'fat' is still associated with a social stigma in Western society, this term sat uncomfortably with several of my participants who saw the attribution of the adjective as a forceful form of 'symbolic violence'. Therefore, with my intent to respect their dignity and give legitimacy to their voice, I had to find a more suitable term that

could still position this research – and the participants’ voices – in the political and scholarly discourse of size acceptance. In the thesis, I thus instead employ the term ‘fuller-figured’ (and at times, ‘larger’, for the sake of diversity, or when needing a more ‘gender-neutral’ term) to refer to my participants. Though ‘fuller-figured’ and ‘fuller-figuredness’ are much less common than the term ‘fat’, and though quite unusual, and even ‘clumsy’, they encompass several identity complexities shared by the participants, which will be presented throughout this research thesis.

Foreword

The genesis of this project might be slightly unorthodox – or rather less than what is normally allowed to be seen within traditional writings about the research process. As I was working on the social construction as a form of critique of the current marketplace representation of fatness, I came to feel more and more disillusioned about the possibility of ever seeing the situation of dignity of fuller-figured individuals improve. As a fuller-figured individual and researcher myself, I felt that all I could do was to critique, or rather ‘rant’ about, this arbitrary situation. During my social encounters, I felt that many people who had not experienced being fuller-figured or otherwise at odd with the expected norm, often misunderstood what I was trying to do, and retaliated with comments that directly implied negative associations with fatness. Comments often went along these lines: ‘Fat can’t be healthy’, ‘But representing fat individuals positively is dangerous, it will promote overeating’, ‘I can’t believe someone can let herself go like this’, ‘Oh, I really need to lose weight!’...

Aside from some very refreshing political acts by members of the Size/Fat Acceptance Movement that cheered me up and gave me hope at times – such as the satirical ‘Museum for Obeast Conservation Studies’ or the preparation for the ‘Fattylympics’ (which I later got to attend at the onset of the London 2012 Olympic games) – I felt that I was (or rather, I was) working against a tide of prejudice against fatness and fuller-figuredness.

When meeting people in a similar situation as mine, however, there was often a feeling of sadness or exasperation about the way fatness, or fuller-figuredness, is conceived and represented culturally, including in the marketplace (by advertisers, news outlets, cinema etc.). Most of these individuals, some of whom later became participants in this research project, generally intimated a chasm between their own self-understanding and the meanings ‘imposed’ on them by the cultural and marketplace context. They, much like myself, reportedly felt trapped ‘in a symbolic straightjacket’ (to use a quote from art philosopher Freeland (2010)).

As I felt ambushed and short of meaningful contribution in this position of critique, I happened to encounter a very unusual micro-exhibition, ‘Mirrors: Prison

Portraits', held at the Scottish National Gallery. Instead of featuring inmates or life in prison as perceived by artists and photographers, the exhibition featured portraits (at least partly) created by inmates themselves, with the coaching of artists/photographers.

The self-portrait is a powerful mechanism for exploring one's personal life and is a powerful means of self-understanding. It has been used for centuries by artists and others to explore their innermost feelings and motivations. (...) Mirrors: Prison Portraits displays the dramatic and thought-provoking results of this process of self-investigation engaged in by participants, and proves the value of visual art in rehabilitating offenders. (Mirrors: Prisons Portraits)

I was personally touched by this exhibition which acted as a window into the inner life of the portrayed individuals: their individuality, depth, creative/poetic abilities. I felt the exhibition was successful in re-humanising individuals who often suffer lack of empathy or lose their 'voice' during their incarceration period. The self-portraits of women, done in conjunction with photographers and inspired partly by the work of Cindy Sherman, were particularly compelling to me. The women were invited to envision and enact their staging thus creating imaginative, distinctive, beautiful photographs, which had a lot to say about their own self-understanding and reflexive abilities.

This exhibition made me realise, and henceforth focus on, a very important problematic I should be addressing with my research project: larger individuals lack involvement in their social depiction. Their representation has been dominated by the marketplace and researchers who take the negative moral and medical associations of their body size for granted.

Surveying fuller-figured individuals in my surroundings about the prospect of creating self-presentations proved to be, for them, a highly stimulating idea. Furthermore, combining self-portraiture with other data collection tools such as written and spoken accounts, could give important insights into the meanings fuller-figured individuals give to their identities. Finally, this would enable people to see beyond the typecast meanings 'scripted' by the marketplace and scientific representations.

A few characteristics of this thesis project were initially inherited from the 'Mirrors project. On one hand, that project was emancipatory in intent. As such, it was thought that the self-reflexive and creative approach could not only enhance scientific knowledge, but serve as a means to improve the well-being and skills of participants (such as 'literacy, communication and social skills'). It also aimed to improve the relationships among participants and with communities beyond the incarceration environment. The project also involved the pairing of inmates with artists, as well as the introduction to existing work of art as part of the process of creation and skill building. As a result, the portraits – though extremely evocative – were highly curated and influenced by artistic conventions introduced by the artist-mentor.

I first conceptualised this project with similar emancipatory intents (reflexivity, visual literacy and communication), as well as with a certain deterministic vision of what participants might want their photos to look like. Namely, I had a specific celebratory vision with regards to body diversity, and was under the (highly biased) impression that participants might want to emulate fashion-style representations given that marketplace-mediated beauty ideals are so culturally pervasive. This drastically changed during the course of this project as it became obvious that there were differences in terms of aspirations and self-understandings coming from the participants. I also realised the importance of acknowledging the emergence of more ambiguous meanings coming from them. This was true, not only as a matter of research integrity but as a means to assert the participants' legitimate perspectives and complex identities, which became the leading epistemological purpose behind this project.

1. Introduction and chapters overview

In her essay 'Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women', fat studies scholar Le'a Kent (2001) carefully scrutinises the representation of larger individuals in a Life magazine special issue¹ on 'Fat', featuring the headline 'Twenty-eight Questions about Fat'. The author observes that images of fat people have been supplanted by depictions of thin individuals and medical images (such as the image of a clogged artery) throughout the issue, with the exception of a small photograph of a fat man next to a diet clinic, a few fat body fragments and a thermogram rendering of a fat woman. Kent describes and discusses the latter:

This thermogram, a visual representation of the temperature of various parts of the body – ranging from a purplish blue at the coolest parts, through greens and yellows, to a deep red and white in the warmest parts – is, in effect, a brightly colored pseudoscientific, psychedelic blob. Evidently, “What do fat people actually look like?” is not one of the twenty-eight questions considered. Yet, the thermogram is significant as an example of the fat body as [a] sign, and always [a] sign of the same thing – lack of control, leading to disease. (Kent, 2001:134)

The thermogram image referred to by Kent can be seen as a colourful example of the type of depictions made of larger individuals; their conspicuous presence in the context of an alleged obesity epidemic, yet also, the very concealment of their human subjectivity under the veil and various apparatuses of medical scrutiny.

Whilst the idealisation of extreme slenderness in marketplace imagery is widely recognised as a problematic issue, the negative portrayal of larger individuals is rarely criticised for its link with stigmatisation and problems with self-esteem. To the contrary, the representation of larger individuals in dehumanising terms in visual culture – especially in news reports, health promotion material and weight-loss advertising – is generally regarded as a necessary means to encourage the pursuit of a 'better', 'healthier' self.

¹ February 1995

Similarly, in the context of a 'war on obesity', *[a] number of consumer researchers have recently shifted their focus to identifying the causes of maladaptive consumer behaviors, such as overeating and obesity (...) and prescribing ways to alleviate such behaviors'* (Smeesters, Mussweiler, & Mandel, 2010: 947). As such, larger individuals have been framed and represented as problematic individuals, impaired by overindulgence and lack of will, control or reason.

Whilst collective and personal welfare is a driving motive behind these researchers' endeavours, it could be argued that their ways of engaging with and representing 'overweight' or 'obese' individuals in their research – as a negative stereotypical portrayal, which generally excludes the perspectives and even participation of those depicted – may also have adverse effects on the well-being, dignity and legitimacy of the population at stake.

For instance, researchers such as Borgerson and Schroeder (see Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005) have highlighted that visual representations shape the way people make sense of apparently similar individuals in daily life. In turn, these internalised stereotypical understandings restrict the way we envision individuals and can be sources of important human prejudices such as discrimination, harassment and physical violence. Paired with the cultural idealisation of slenderness, the constant negative representation of fatness –and the absence of larger individuals in a variety of roles – is also known to contribute to low self-esteem among those self-identified as 'too fat'. To a further extent, self-esteem problems related to body weight have been linked to unsustainable identity projects and consequences such as eating disorders, depression, chronic health troubles and even in some cases, death.

Typecast views of larger individuals are pervasive in traditional, positivist research. A positivist view of larger individuals is traditionally seen as the way to 'know' and eventually 'cure' the fat individual. However, this objectivist view – narrowed down to the quest for causes, effects and means of alleviation of 'excess' weight – discards many aspects of the humanity of these individuals. This narrow quest for knowledge and suppression of fatness may be seen as reductionist in a broader quest for human and social comprehension. It typically disregards aspects such as self-understanding

and meaning given to the body, lived experiences and aspirations, which are arguably important as part of individuals' subjective experiences and can have dramatic effects in shaping one's understanding of well-being.

Departing from an objectivist, medically and morally problematising view of larger individuals, this research – inspired by the work of fat studies scholars and feminist marketing researchers – adopts a more 'political' view of fatness and well-being. I argue that including the 'embodied perspectives' or 'voice', of fuller-figured individuals in the act of marketplace and research representation is important for the sake of their human dignity, legitimacy and well-being. Instead of relying on the framing and representation of fatness generally imposed upon larger individuals, I am interested in the way they envision and enact their self-presentation in visual culture and research. As such, this research explores the different ways a group of fuller-figured women want to be presented in visual culture, and what meanings they give to their selves, bodies and well-being. To do so, I developed a tailor-made approach, inspired by feminist research principles. Participants were given free rein to conceptualise, enact and review their own portraits with the help of a professional photographer. The resulting visual and verbal data can be seen as much-needed alternative accounts, acknowledging the voice of 'lay' fuller-figured individuals in research. At the same time, their accounts act as a demonstration of the possibility to depict larger individuals in more 'subjectifying' ways in marketplace imagery and research.

Additionally, the inclusion of their subjective perspectives contributes in filling an epistemological blind spot in existing consumer research (CR) theories concerning our understanding of 'larger individuals'. More specifically, this research provides alternative understandings of the ways different fuller-figured women – as individuals located in Western marketplace culture, more generally – can envision and experience their selves/bodies. The participants' accounts highlight the relevance of identity spheres such as beauty, health and inner traits, and the importance of the body, which in turn, provide alternative understandings of well-being.

Overall, this research provides empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions to the field of CR, as well as to scholars and activists interested in improving the representation and welfare of larger individuals. In a slightly paradoxical

turn, this research (with a strong focus on participants' perspectives) also allows me to partake in the discourse of health promotion, highlighting important implications and promising avenues for policy makers and marketing managers to rethink individual mobilisation. Finally, this research process will enable me to contribute additional insights for the interpretation of participatory visual outputs, as well as for the pursuit of feminist-inspired research.

In the 'Literature review' chapter, I first highlight how the current problematisation of fatness can be seen as a social construction, which can be parcelled out in three spheres of debate: the moral, the medical and the identity political. I move on to highlight the ways in which the 'fat individual', as a construct, has been tackled and represented in CR. I close this chapter by bringing forth CR work dealing with issues of ethics in visual representation and by relating it to the problematic representation of fat individuals in the marketplace and research representation.

Following the 'Literature review' chapter, I point to the moral bias found in much research designed to 'solve' the problem of fatness, as well as the main gap sought to be addressed by this research: the general lack of inclusion of the perspective of larger individuals in CR. This helps me to contextualise and refine the leading emergent research question of *'What public images and meanings do lay fuller-figured individuals want to convey of themselves? And consequently, what are their personal meanings/conceptions of their selves, bodies and well-being?'*

In the 'Framework' chapter, I first outline the core 'poststructuralist' concepts used in this inquiry, such as identity, subjectivity, body and gender. I then expose the feminist epistemological principles that guided this project, especially those of acknowledging the 'voice' of the participants in this research context.

The next chapter, 'Methodological approach', is dedicated to presenting the methodological approach used in this project, emphasising the emergent, and rather 'messy', nature of the research design – built as per my encounter with participants and reflexive involvement with the research. The research has taken inspiration from

the 'Mirrors: Prison Portraits' self-portrait approach, as well as more generally, from a feminist-inspired 'photovoice' approach. As such, it enjoined nine fuller-figured participants (including me as a fuller-figured participant-researcher) to envision, self-direct, enact and review their desired self-presentation, primarily as a means to access their voice, and to understand the meanings they associate with and want to see associated with their selves and bodies.

In the subsequent 'Findings' chapter, I first address the 'issue' of wording, in light of participants' accounts. I also summarily present participants' views on current marketplace representations and offerings relating to fuller-figured women, in order to use them as a base to (partly) contrast their own self-understandings, aspirations and ability to self-present. I then introduce each of the nine participants by emphasising their self-presentation concept, using quotes from their accounts and showing some of their favourite self-directed portraits.

The 'Interpretation' chapter provides my attempt (in the cautious, feminist sense) at making sense of the identity themes identified in the participants' accounts and envisioned portraits. I highlight how their understanding of core identity spheres such as 'appearance', 'health' and 'virtue' are sometimes reshaped to be more inclusive of their embodied selves, and move from a traditional moralistic discourse to a therapeutic discourse.

In the first part of the 'Discussion' chapter, I use the work of sociologist Eva Illouz (2008) to retrace the emergence and emphasise the cultural pervasiveness of this therapeutic discourse. I argue that – though used as a driver for weight loss - its appropriation by participants, with (consumerist) feminist and Eastern philosophical undertones, enables a space that legitimises the 'embodied self' and a quest for self-actualisation that does not presupposes the achievement of a thin ideal self.

After discussing the socio-cultural forces underpinning the participants' self-understandings and quests, I propose, in the second part of the 'Discussion' chapter, a set of contributions to existing literature in CR. Namely, I posit the importance of a quest for authenticity and an awareness of bodily experiences for some consumers in order to make sense of the self and their acts of consumption. This brings me to point

to the adoption of a 'self-nurtured' approach by consumers, which challenges the way traditional CR has oversimplified and problematised larger peoples' health-related consumption behaviours. In the third part of the 'Discussion' chapter, I return to the 'individual' level and try to assess the impact of participants' accounts and portraits in perspective of a wider question of ethics in visual representation and identity politics. In the fourth and last part of the 'Discussion' chapter, I provide a reflexive review of the research process as well as the emerging insights and potential avenues to contribute to ethical practices of representation in research.

Finally, the 'Conclusion' chapter is an opportunity for me to reiterate and substantiate the driving claim behind this research and to encourage further researchers to adopt this route. Again, I argue for the importance of the 'voice' of different fuller-figured women – or individuals, for that matter – in creating more subjectifying representations in the marketplace and research. Likewise, their 'voice' is important for the sake of developing academic 'understandings' that favour their dignity and legitimacy, and also encompass visions of well-being that are aligned with the concerned individuals themselves.

2. Literature review

This literature review is divided into three main parts. First, I use the framework of medical anthropologist Sobal (1995) to highlight how the prevailing discourses around fatness, which often seek to identify corpulence as an objectivist problem, can instead be parcelled out into three main types of constructivist model of social control: the moral, the medical and the political.

The second section is dedicated to reviewing the existing literature dealing with the construct of fatness in the field of CR. I begin with an exploration of the more traditional stances on bodily weight and image, and end with an overview of alternative perspectives on fatness in CR. Using the constructivist approach and viewing fatness from the political lens reveals a gap left by consumer researchers who have overlooked the way larger individuals make sense of their selves, bodies and well-being, and a significant ontological biases in the traditional CR framing of fatness. This also highlights important ways in which we may further our work in promoting the dignity of consumers in the field of CR.

In the third and final section, I present work dealing with ethical concerns behind market representation practices. These not only relate to the portrayal of fat individuals in the marketplace but also to the implicit understanding of fat individuals in consumer research.

2.1 Fatness as a social construction

Scholars from various social disciplines contend that the meaning of fatness should be interpreted differently depending on the historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts from which the term is being taken. The discourses around fatness should, therefore, be seen as socially constructed rather than as objective facts or universal truths (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Klein, 2001; Sobal, 1995). To posit their constructivist claim, these authors remind us that many traditional societies value(d) fatness as a sign of health, fertility, beauty and wealth; contrasting the contemporary vision of fatness, which is generally seen as bad, unhealthy, ugly and associated with a lack of economic means. In societies characterised by food scarcity, for instance, fatness was/is seen as a desirable sign of prosperity, whereas in societies of abundance, such as the current Westernised consumption society, being able to deny cheaply available food is seen as both a virtue and a luxury (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Klein, 2001; Sobal, 1995). Sobal (1995) highlights how fatness has been predominantly typified as a moral and/or medical problem, and thus 'remedies' to the fatness 'problem' are embedded in either a moral or medical model of social control.

2.1.1 The moral model of social control

According to Sobal (1995), the moral model of social control is the longest standing and most pervasive way in which fatness has been problematised at the social level in the Western world. Authors in various disciplines emphasise the dominance of the Judeo-Christian moral system as playing a chief role in defining how we perceive the body, gender, beauty and corpulence in our modern society (Bordo, 2003; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Klein, 2001; Synnott, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Literary scholar Klein discusses how the judgement of fatness has been mediated, not only by the supply and availability of food, but also by the moralistic and philosophical views of the time. He highlights how the takeover of Christianity has shifted the vision of the body from being seen as 'the mirror of divine perfection' to 'an object of humiliation and shame' in the pre-modern era. Since the body was now seen as 'the locus of pleasure and hence of sin (...) emaciation became a sign of spiritual elevation' because assumed to imply a control of the body by the virtues of the soul (Klein, 2001: 27). Conversely, fatness – seen as a direct outcome of gluttony, laziness or greed – became associated with sin, and, as such, turned into a negative aesthetic construct in Western society.

Several authors contend that disembodied ideals are more prevalent for women (Hartley, 2001; Synnott, 1993) than men. Klein (2001) remarks that fatness, as a valued feminine aesthetic, came and went generally as a counter-current to the dominant Judeo-Christian disembodied ideal. Fatness has also been seen as a transgression of the Protestant work ethic (King, Shapiro, Hebl, Singletary, & Turner, 2006), and, as such, becomes framed as a sign of laziness and associated to lower-economic status. As a general rule in the collective consciousness and visual culture, angular and ascetic bodies reflecting the 'insubstantial gothic ideals' (Klein, 2001) turned into a synonym for moral composure and refinement (Allen, 1991; Bordo, 2003; Klein, 2001), whilst 'fatness' became the epitome of sinful decadence and immoral overconsumption (Huff, 2001). The moral model provides the basis for the current (and increasingly globalised) aesthetic ideals, as well as the representation of fat individuals 'as repulsive, funny, ugly, unclean, obscene' (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001: 2) in the marketplace and popular visual culture. The moral model also fosters the typification of the fat individual in two extremes: as simple-minded and asexual, or vicious and grotesquely hypersexual (Braziel, 2001; Losano & Risch, 2001; Mazer, 2001; Mosher, 2001; Ulaby, 2001). According to Huff (2001), fat bodies started being regarded in the mid-Victorian era as a sign of capitalist abuse, and, as such, the fat body started acting as a visual bulwark against capitalist greed, and the body size, as a gauge of respectability and moderation.

The scarcity of high-profile figures with whom fat people may identify positively further emphasises the lack of currency fatness has as a moral/aesthetic ideal. Exceptions aside, fat people are generally absent as 'normal' individuals in visual culture, unless used as a comic factor or to inspire repulsion and loathing. The 'headless fatty' phenomenon, where the fat individual is represented (often in the news and other journalistic media) with his/her head 'neatly cropped out of the picture', is common in the context of the 'obesity scare' and leads fat studies' authors, such as Kent (2001) and Cooper (2007), to discuss the dehumanising, subjecthood-denying effects of the approach:

As Headless Fatties, the body becomes symbolic: we are there but we have no voice, not even a mouth in a head, no brain, no thoughts or opinions. Instead

we are reduced and dehumanised as symbols of cultural fear: the body, the belly, the arse, food. There's a symbolism, too, in the way that the people in these photographs have been beheaded. (Cooper 2007)

The moral model 'suggests that fat people are responsible for their condition and should be punished as a means of social control for being fat' (Sobal, 1995: 69). King, Shapiro et al. indicate that the attribution of a stigma as self-inflicted 'may serve as a justification that results in increased discrimination' (2006: 581). According to several fat studies' authors and members of the size acceptance movement², people seem to think there is nothing wrong with denying dignity to corpulent individuals, unlike in the case of other historically oppressed groups. In the Editors' Introduction of their collection 'Bodies out of bounds' (2001), LeBesco and Braziel observe:

As people in the 1990s increasingly recognised that language creates reality, we have made efforts to use language that promotes more equitable relations among people. As a result, terms deemed offensive to less powerful groups are frowned on. Racial and ethnic jokes are less frequently punctuated by laughter. Stories that denigrate women and physically challenged people are not well received. Still, there is something about fat that escapes this change. (2001: 2)

Fatness, regarded as a self-inflicted stigma, is interpreted as deserving subjection to the condemning and narrativising³ gaze (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Huff, 2001; Klein, 2001), and becomes an easy target for intimidation and violence (Royce, 2009) as well as social discrimination (Amadiou, 2002; Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Bordo, 2003; Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Johnston & Taylor, 2008; Kent, 2001; Orbach, 1978, 2006, 2009; Sobal, 1995; Synnott, 1993; Wann, 2009). Furthermore, attraction to fatness is often rendered as unlikely, distasteful, fetishist or deviant (Hartley, 2001; Klein, 2001; Mazer, 2001; Mosher, 2001; Pyle & Loewy, 2009), whilst displaying comfort with one's own fatness is seen as disgraceful, obscene, dangerous and as 'not playing by the rules' (Bordo, 2003; Hartley, 2001; Wann, 2009). An example of

² Also known as fat acceptance movement. People relating to this group campaign to end discrimination and bigotry based on size.

³ The narrativising gaze in this case refers to the act of staring, often with condescension, at fat individuals and coming up with assumptions for the causes of fatness, as well as presuppositions on the individual's character.

this can be found in King, Shapiro et al.'s (2006) research which demonstrates that '[w]hen fat people engage in diet talk around shop clerks (...) [they] are treated better than if [they] talk about [their] bodies with pride' (Wann 2009: xx).

Fatness is rejected by society, but often also by those in that very physical state (Hartley 2001, Kent 2001). This is especially the case for females (Hartley 2001), but also increasingly for males (Mosher, 2001). Hartley contends that '[w]omen today are bound by fears, by oppression, and by stereotypes that depict large women as ungainly, unfeminine, and unworthy of appreciation' (2001: 64). Using Foucault's work on docile bodies, the author contends that women have internalised the revulsion of fat and the necessity 'to construct female bodies that are demonstrably smaller and weaker than men's bodies' (2001: 62). As such, whilst highlighting the potential of fatness as a transgressive feminist practice given its assertion of physical power and spatial dominance, she contends that deviation from the waif-like ideals is seen as a source of terror and a punishment for women, in itself. Using Kristeva's concept of abjection, author Kent (2001) describes how people are brought by the moral discourse to deny their fatness as an impostor. Fatness is seen as a temporary identity, whereas the real, authentic and presumably skinny self is dormant, waiting to bloom and to save the fat individual from his/her state of abjection (Kent, 2001).

2.1.2 The medical model of social control

Although medical claims have been made about fatness for centuries (see for instance Huff, 2001; Sobal, 1995), it was only in the 1950s that the corpulence issue became framed within a medical model, with fatness seen increasingly as a matter of sickness rather than one of immorality (Sobal, 1995). The emergence of the medical model of social control 'occurred as medical people and their allies made increasingly frequent, powerful, and persuasive claims that they should exercise social control over fatness in contemporary society' (Sobal, 1995: 69). Sobal explains, using the work on the medicalisation of deviance by medical sociologist Peter Conrad, that 'Medicalisation is a process by which [previously] nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of diseases or disorder' (Sobal, 1995: 69). He contends that the medicalisation of fatness – to the extent that we know it today – has been made possible by, and enhanced by, certain factors and acts, such as re-

labelling fatness, broadening eligibility and access to treatment, and by building a consensus among stakeholders (such as those operating within the pharmaceutical, diet and fitness industries) that benefit from and disseminate the medical discourse.

According to Sobal (ibid), the act of re-labelling is, in itself, reality-altering, and contributes to the paradigmatic shift from the moral to the medical model by changing the definition of fatness and prescribing different acts of remediation. The author contends that medical claims-making has moved away from morally loaded terms to more 'objective', 'scientifically sounding argot' (or jargon) such as 'obese', 'adipose' and 'overweight' to qualify the fat body, or 'acoria', 'polyphagia' and 'hyperorexia' as well as 'lethargy' to replace the sin-laden terms 'gluttony' or 'laziness'. In this sense, by using 'more scientifically neutral' terminologies, the medical model of social control not only prescribed medical control, but contributed to the essentialisation (or predetermination) of fatness as something that occurs to the individual rather than something that the individual inflicts upon his/herself. As such, the medical model can be seen as bringing much-needed relief to fat individuals who were previously castigated for their sinful behaviour under the moral model. Under the medical model, the responsibility for fatness is not solely attributed to the fat individual. Fatness is seen more as the outcome of environmental, genetic, psychological or socio-economic factors that are outside of the 'affected' individuals' control.

Sobal (1995) also explains how the expansion of the 'eligible patient population' for medically supervised treatment and the increasing availability of medically sanctioned, legitimated or inspired treatments in the marketplace have contributed to further position fatness in the medical model of social control. He discusses how different stakeholders (including industries that sometimes adopt the role of moral entrepreneurs) benefit from, and contribute to, disseminating the medicalised discourse around fatness as a means of legitimising their promise of health and beauty. The health-care, pharmaceutical, fitness, food and food-service, clothing and fitness clothing, fashion and beauty industries, as well as the obvious weight-loss industries, all position themselves around the medicalised discourse of fatness.

For Sobal (ibid), a crucial contributing factor to the medicalisation of obesity is its official recognition as a disease, or, at least, as an important risk factor for mortal

conditions. His essay (1995), which considers the medical model of social control as socially constructed, also highlights the problematic nature of the medicalisation of fatness (including its associated constructs such as disease, the Body Mass Index (BMI), normality and the obesity epidemic). He points to the current debate around the status of 'obesity' as a disease, the latter being sanctioned as such by featuring in the International Classifications of Diseases (ICD) released in 1977 by the World Health Organization (WHO). This status – resulting from the very fact of being listed in the ICD – became more ambiguous once the name of the classification changed in the subsequent 1992 edition to encompass 'Related Health Problems'. The classification model thus henceforth included 'conditions and situations which are not diseases but represent risk factors to health' (Heshka & Allison, 2001: 1401), and which constitute a better description of 'obesity' according to the authors (obesity researchers). Whilst highlighting that 'obesity' is referred to as a disease in a few official and scientific publications, Heshka and Allison (2001) suggest that there is seldom a rationale explaining the decision to do so. They contend that the rare authors who try to explain their framing of fatness as a disease use tautological or weak analogical claims, which would otherwise best match the risk factor proposition (and as such do not fit an accepted definition of disease). They also claim, after analysing the medical definitions and understandings of the terms 'disease' and 'obesity', that the labelling of 'obesity' as a disease 'solely on the basis of a BMI or percentage body fat in excess of some threshold' is problematic, for:

[T]he only sign or symptom may be the excess fat which is also the only defining feature of the condition – there are no other inevitable clinical or subclinical signs; many obese persons suffer no impairment as a consequence of their obesity; it ignores the probabilistic nature of the relation between obesity and consequent adverse events which is accurately conveyed by the term risk factor; it poses conceptual problems, e.g. is the obesity which is a sign of a disease, itself a disease? (Heshka & Allison, 2001: 1403)

Although their standpoint is that 'obesity' is potentially related to serious health problems once reaching a certain level, their article brings them to question the very notions of 'disease', 'impairment' and 'abnormality', noting that the importance and meaningfulness of these terms (especially in the case of certain ambiguous conditions

such as 'obesity', 'mental illness' or 'addiction problems') is often the result of negotiations and consensus within and beyond the medical sphere. Aside from invalidating the disease status of 'obesity', Heshka and Allison (2001) also render the cut-off criteria used to predict health and longevity according to corpulence (such as the BMI, as well as the percentage body fat in excess) contentious, and potentially arbitrary. They assert that people deemed 'obese' according to both of these criteria can be in a better state of health and fitness and have a higher longevity than their skinnier counterparts; a claim that resonates with the thoughts of other scholars such as Oliver (2006) and 'Health at Every Size' leading proponents Bacon and Aphramor (2011). Furthermore, recent medical research studies 'did not find "overweight" (BMI 25 to <30) to be associated with increased mortality' and reveal the minimum mortality rate to be close to a BMI of 25 (Flegal, Graubard, Williamson, & Gail, 2005: 1866); thus rendering what is otherwise considered as 'overweight' as a potentially optimal weight for longevity.

Sobal (1995), Gard and Wright (2005), Oliver (2006) and Wann (2009) note that the BMI – relied upon by several governmental health organisations, including the current international standard set by the WHO – is a direct derivative from the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's actuarial tables released in 1959. From the field of political science, Oliver (2006) tries to debunk the myth of the obesity epidemic in one of his books dedicated to the subject. He argues that the designation of overweightness or obesity, as per the BMI, was never based on criteria of health, but rather 'criteria of profit and measurement within the insurance industry' (2006: 19–20). After scrutinising the methodologies used to generate the BMI and studying official reports of longevity, Oliver asserts, in a similar fashion to Heshka and Allison, that the BMI is misadapted to the measurement of health, 'obesity' and risks of mortality, and also inappropriate as a means of determining causes of mortality (the BMI could, however, be used as a reflection of 'other unmeasured influences'). Several authors remark that the 'obese' and 'overweight' thresholds have been a matter of contention and fluctuation for the past 20 years and thus challenge the reliability and validity of this mode of assessment (Sobal, 1995; Gard & Wright, 2005; Oliver, 2006; Wann, 2009). BMI is, perhaps, an assessment of something that may be potentially inconsequential until well beyond the obesity threshold (Heshka & Allison, 2001; Oliver 2006), and, even then, 'still within the bounds of statistical uncertainty' (Oliver, 2006:

23).

For several authors, this scepticism, or rejection of the common criteria used to measure ideal weight, undermines the notions of 'normal', 'over' or 'under' weight. In their book *Obesity Epidemic: Science, Morality and Ideology*, Gard and Wright (2005) debate that there is an inherent morality behind the medical discourse; a point of view that is agreed upon by Obesity Researchers Heshka & Allison (2001), who qualify their own discipline – medicine – as an exercise of social construction, negotiation and consensus, which is not inconsequential. Oliver (2006) points to the reality-shaping power of the medical discourse by highlighting that the American National Institute of Health's adoption in 1988 of a BMI of over 25 as its criterion for establishing overweightness (rather than a BMI of over 27) turned 'more than 37 million Americans' overweight 'overnight' (2006: 22). In his concluding chapter, Oliver argues that '[i]f we simply classified obesity at a level where body fat is incontrovertibly pathological, only a fraction of Americans would qualify and this "epidemic" would vanish' (2006: 182).

Implication of the medical model

Heshka and Allison argue that the controversial labelling of 'obesity' as a disease could be taken as an opportunity for social advocacy and abuse of the victim role. As such, they claim that '[t]he concept of disease involves a role in which the patient is excused from responsibility for his/her condition and from certain obligations'. According to them, this also creates 'an obligation for treatment', one where the cost is transferred to someone else (society, insurers). This position, where obesity is a preventable, self-inflicted condition with burdening social costs, appears to have the most currency in the mass-mediated discourse on fatness.

For Sobal (1995), this pervasiveness of morality (even in the medical model) can help in understanding why the implementing of the medical model of social control – despite its increasing prevalence – has not completely surpassed the moral one. Sobal agrees that a complete medicalisation could take away at least some of the moral blame or responsibility of fatness from the fat individual. But rather than emphasising the medicalisation as an opportunity for 'free riding', he highlights that '[s]ickness and disability carry their own stigma and create dependency on medical

expertise under the sick role' (1995: 81). Cultural critics, as well as fat activists, argue that this medical paradigm has stigmatising and dehumanising effects, where fat individuals are seen as inefficacious or costly social burdens.

2.1.3 The political model of social control

Aside from the moral and medical framing of fatness, Sobal (1995) also highlights the role of social advocates and scholars in allowing the emergence of what he terms a political framing of fatness. The tenants of this model see the prejudices against fatness as problematic in terms of identity politics. Similar to the feminist movement, there are two dominant strands of thought within the political movement: the essentialist and the non-essentialist.

For the adopters of an essentialist vision, fatness is seen 'as the unfortunately unavoidable outcome resulting from some original variable gone awry' (LeBesco, 2004: 84). As such, several tenants of the essentialist viewpoint use the medical model (genetic causes for instance) as a support for their political claim for dignity and respect for the fat person (LeBesco 2004, Sobal 1995).

For tenants of a less essentialist or non-essentialist vision of fatness, de-medicalising the discourse (along with removing the negative moral connotations) is seen as a way to gain political ground and dignity for the fat person. Whilst some commentators devote energy to relativising or refuting the 'obesity' scare, others contend that the discourse on fatness should be taken out of the medical realm altogether – regardless of its validity. To avoid further prejudice, tenants of the non-essentialist political model suggest that it is necessary to dissociate the notion of fatness not just from the socio-economic/health consequences of obesity, but also from its causative origins – or aetiology (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001). The objective of this is to prevent the metonymical framing of larger individuals as merely, if not outrageously, what they presumably eat, or as a 'walking disease'. To a similar end, and from the standpoint that discourse creates realities, some fat studies scholars and members of size/fat acceptance movements also move away from scientifically sounding or morally loaded terms, and reclaim labels they see as more neutral, such as 'fat' (Sobal, 1995; Wann, 2009). They reject medical terms such as 'overweight' or

'obese' and favour the term 'fat' over the moral euphemisms such as 'cuddly' and 'round', or other such terms.

Some activists and scholars depart from the medical discourse to tackle the social construction of fatness. In this sense, they also work on debunking the dominant health discourse (by focusing generally on its constructivist underpinnings rather than on counter-medical claims) and/or on highlighting social inequalities in policies as well as 'sizeism' in the cultural discourse. As fat studies scholar Owen puts it:

Finding the fat gene or explaining to others that fat people can be fit too, are simply not part of my political agenda. Addressing how sizeism affects fat persons is. (2008: 9)

Beside the discourse on oppression and the stigmatisation of fatness, scholars such as LeBesco (2004) and Kent (2001) emphasise the necessity to honour 'the ability of human actors to participate in the creation of meaning via discursive processes of communication and politics' (LeBesco, 2004: 84). In this manner, acknowledging the capacity of fat or otherwise fuller-figured individuals to create meaning for themselves, may prevent concepts such as 'fatness' from settling into their negative moral/aesthetic and medical frame. As such, fat studies scholars seem especially interested in the emergence of new forms of assertive or subversive representations of fatness (burlesque, fat fiction, fat pornography) and their positive associations (fat and proud, beautiful, active, fit and/or healthy). These forms of 'fat play' (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001) give a voice, and assert the subjectivity and capacity for action/self-determination (agency) of the fat individuals involved (generally fat or size acceptance activists), as well as, more generally, help in destabilising the naturalised meanings and stereotypes of fatness (LeBesco, 2004).

Whilst fat studies have documented the perspectives of campaigners, and artists, as well as their own as self-identified fat individuals, little work has been carried out focusing on 'lay'⁴ fuller-figured individuals' self-understanding. A recent exception

⁴ The term 'lay', from 'layman' is often used in academia to refer to individuals 'without professional or specialized knowledge in a particular subject' (Oxford dictionary). However, as this will become clearer in my

is Tischner (2013), who contributed to fat studies scholarship from the field of social psychology. Using a feminist standpoint, she investigated what types of subject positions were adopted by 'ordinary' larger individuals. Her interpretation, using Foucauldian discourse analysis, emphasised how participants felt that their bodies are the constant object of scrutiny and judgement by society. Though their bodies are constantly 'visible' in that sense, they are also perceived as 'invisible' because '*excluded from romance in the heterosexual male gaze*' (Tischner, 2013: 55). Whilst being subjected to this male gaze is generally seen as negative from a feminist theoretical perspective, being expelled from it was perceived by participants as detrimental to a positive understanding of the self and self-esteem.

Overall, Tischner's research account suggests that her participants were somewhat (to greatly) affected by the negative social discourses of fatness, especially with regards to the social understanding of their body appearance, health condition and gendered identity. Tischner's investigation showed that '[a] small number of the women took up the subject position of the unhealthy overeater, reinforcing biomedical discourses that linked body weight with physical health; however, they rejected the subject position of the irresponsible fat person, drawing on the psychological discourses of mental distress and addictive behaviour' (2013: 92). Nevertheless, most of her participants adopted alternative subject positions where they viewed themselves as healthy, health-literate, active and proactively seeking healthy lifestyles (seen as a matter of personal responsibility). However, 'while health and healthy living were constituted as important and something to be taken seriously, health and life were construed as a lot more complex than just looking after one's weight', and affected by roles, responsibilities, time and economic constraints. These various and intersecting positions adopted by participants, and factors reportedly affecting their envisioned lifestyle, 'draw attention to the inappropriateness of the ill-conceived health promotion strategy of targeting certain sectors in the population delineated by their body mass index only' (Tischner, 2013: 93).

With regards to the theme of appearance, participants seemed ambivalent,

epistemological framework, this should not be assumed to mean that these individuals are not 'experts' in their own lived experience.

'position[ing] themselves, and fat women generally, at the margins of society, judged as unattractive and barely feminine' (Tischner, 2013: 73). However, rather than seeing these as rightful positions for fat individuals, they are rather viewed by participants as imposed due to the limited offerings in terms of clothing style. Conversely, Tischner's female participants 'constituted themselves as interested in fashion and appearance, but regulated and hampered by the fashion and retail industry, and a neoliberal society that values self-perfection according to socially constructed standards which equate fat with unattractive, and unhealthy' (2013: 73).

Fatness seemed to have a greater significance in the life and self-understanding of Tischner's female participants, which brings the author to suggest that their self-understanding is shaped by a 'masculine hegemony'. Whilst '*[m]en seem to have a greater variety of discursive resources available for the construction of their hegemonic masculinity (...) [f]or women the body always takes centre stage and is metonymic for their entire self*' (Tischner, 2013: 93). In that sense, several female participants appeared to '*constru[e] themselves as a mosaic of (faulty) body parts [whilst m]en construed themselves (...) as, whole, integrated selves*' (2013: 118), where what is perceived as a physical 'flaw' has less of an effect on self-understanding and overall self-esteem.

Tischner concludes her interpretation by pointing to the heterogeneity among the group; highlighting '*the dynamic, varied and at times contradictory nature of subjectivities and subject positions available, taken up and rejected by fat individuals*' (2013: 118). To Tischner, this heterogeneity is consequential for it suggests that health promotion, research and advocacy based on a simplistic socially constructed category such as 'fat', may be, not only limitative, but completely inadequate.

In summary, whereas the dominant discourses render fatness as something objectively bad or pathological, these very framings can also be seen as social constructions. Sobal (1995) highlighted three models which typified the issue of fatness, including the moral (inclusive of aesthetic) model of social control – the most long-standing and pervasive paradigm – and the medical one, which is also said to be infused with moralistic assumptions. These two competing dominant models are said to have instigated important forms of prejudice towards fat individuals, and, as

such, have motivated the emergence of a new political model of social control of fatness. More radical tenants of the political model (such as the anti-essentialists) try to shift the discourse away from the pervasive negative moral/medical understanding of fatness by focusing on alternative meanings, and the meaning-making abilities of people in that embodied state.

2.2 Representation of fatness in Consumer Research

In this section, we will be looking at the ways in which research accounts in the positivist and postpositivist traditions have engaged with the issue of weight and made sense of fat consumers. This will enable me to highlight the lack of inclusion of larger individual's perspectives – an important gap in CR - as well as a moral bias that has consequences for the way we make sense of larger individuals as consumers and within society.

2.2.1 The promotion of slenderness and consumer welfare

The archetype of beauty conveyed by the Western market – and increasingly popularised by the forces of globalisation – can be described as slim, young, Caucasian, and, very often, 'enhanced' by cosmetic surgery or editing software (Bordo, 2003; Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Orbach, 2009). Researchers in CR, communication and psychology have shown that many young women have a tendency to compare themselves with idealised models in advertising (Bower & Bower, 2001; Goodman et al., 2008; Halliwell & Dittmar, 2005; Martin & Kennedy, 1994; Richins, 1991). This gendered tendency is due, according to Peck and Loken (2004), to the way in which females are culturally conditioned '*to engage in more self-reflection than men with respect to body size and body attractiveness*' (2004: 429).

Martin and Kennedy (1994), who studied social comparisons between advertising models among preadolescent and adolescent girls, highlight how young females tend to engage in upward comparison with advertising's idealised models, either for reasons of self-evaluation or self-improvement. In particular, it has been demonstrated that the upward comparison between women of different ages with advertising models for the purpose of self-evaluation (rather than self-improvement) is

often accompanied by negative effects on mood and self-esteem (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2005) and may cause anxiety and dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance (Bower & Bower, 2001; Goodman et al., 2008; Martin & Kennedy, 1994; Richins, 1991). Upward comparison for the purpose of self-improvement, however, has not been found to generate the same negative effects according to Halliwell and Dittmar, who suggest that exposure *'to ultra-thin models does not necessarily have immediate negative consequences on at least one aspect of women's body image'* (2005: 259). On the contrary, if the idealised model is seen as inspiring rather than threatening, from a self-improvement perspective, Martin and Kennedy (1994) suggest that these comparisons, whilst seemingly benign in the short term on body image and self-esteem, can lead to potentially harmful identity-improvement projects among preadolescent and adolescent girls. These may include strict diets and compensatory practices associated with anorexia and bulimia. Thus, these authors suggest that there is a reason for concern with the physical and psychological well-being of women, given the constant idealisation of the slender archetype.

Whilst several consumer researchers of a more positivist strand express concern with the consequences of the exposure of women to slender ideals, from a consumer well-being perspective, there is, as Peck and Locken put it, *'little attention [...] given to the positive consequences associated with more realistic portrayals'* (2004: 426). These authors investigated the impact of the exposure of students (male and female) to larger-sized female models. They concluded that exposure to fuller-figured models *'may encourage women to have more positive thoughts concerning their own body size, which may be reflected back to more positive ratings of the larger-sized models in the ads'* (2004: 437). However, these authors stress the importance of the context and indicate that, in order to be well received, these *'non-traditional larger-sized models'* should be featured in media outlets *'that support and accept these differences'* (2004: 439), as opposed to a traditional setting where only slenderness is valued. Under appropriate conditions, valuing more diverse and realistic female body types *'may result in some positive effects for society in general and specifically for women'* (2004: 439).

Nevertheless, the positive outlook on the valuing and representation of diversity is being seen as having some limits, where fatness, and its representation, is

potentially seen as something that could feed into another problem requiring consumer researchers' attention: 'the obesity epidemic'. It seems that fatness is straightforwardly seen as problematic.

2.2.2 Representation of fatness in traditional Consumer Research

Typically, consumer researchers dealing with the topic of fatness position their research within the 'obesity crisis' discourse, generally making use of alarming 'obesity' rates/health statistics (Aydinoğlu & Krishna, 2011; Bolton, Cohen, & Bloom, 2006; Chandon & Wansink, 2007; Do Vale, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2008; Howlett, Burton, Bates, & Huggins, 2009; Kahn & Wansink, 2004; Kidwell, Hardesty, & Childers, 2008; Krishnamurthy & Prokopec, 2010; McFerran, Dahl, Fitzsimons, & Morales, 2010; Moisiso & Beruchashvili, 2010; Mukhopadhyay, Sengupta, & Ramanathan, 2008; Scott, Nowlis, Mandel, & Morales, 2008; Seiders & Petty, 2004; Sharpe, Staelin, & Huber, 2008; Smeesters & Mandel, 2006; Smeesters et al., 2010). In the case of Sharpe et al.'s 2008 article, fatness is raised as an issue for its alleged important economic effects on consumers and society. For the most part, consumer researchers – interpreting the issue of 'obesity' as a matter of consumer well-being or equity – feel compelled to take an active role in what they see as a battle or 'fight'.

Fatness as a result of overconsumption

Despite the existence of several causal hypotheses for fatness in the medical realm, traditional consumer researchers consider food overconsumption to be the main cause of weight 'problems'. As an illustration, Moisiso and Beruchashvili start their article 'Questing for Well-Being at Weight Watchers' by asking '*Why do millions of consumers in the United States struggling with the consequences of overconsumption believe that membership in a support group is crucial to their well-being?*' (2010: 857). As such, there is a presumption that people dealing with 'weight issues' are doing so as a result of overconsumption and thus are seeking ways of decreasing consumption as both preventive and curative measures for reducing 'obesity' levels.

Several consumer researchers readily attribute fatness to the consumption of a high number of calories. Their research was, in most cases, exploring food-selection

behaviours of people in general (not specifically those of fat individuals). Their results have shown that overconsumption can be attributed to a deliberate (and potentially reoccurring) 'indulgence' in the form of a larger size or a richer option; a seemingly harmless food choice such as small packaging (Do Vale et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2008) or 'health-positioned' alternatives (Chandon & Wansink, 2007) that can lead to increased consumption. Lower-calorie products are readily seen as healthier (Chandon & Wansink, 2007) and wiser choices, although one may debate the healthiness of over-restricting caloric intake or consuming artificial replacements (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001).

As a general rule, consumer researchers attribute overconsumption either to a 'failure of self-control' (Do Vale et al., 2008; Krishnamurthy & Prokopec, 2010) or lack of responsibility paired with a cultural propensity towards high-fat food consumption (Bolton et al., 2006) or, alternatively, as a problem of judgement and perception. Supporting this latter argument, Chandon and Wansink (2007) defend a 'health halo' hypothesis which explains why a decrease in 'obesity' rates has not been recorded, notwithstanding the apparent 'improvements' in consumer habits (increased favouring of low-calorie, healthy products). Their health halo explanation relies on the argument that despite giving the impression to the consumer that he or she is making healthier choices, healthy claims made by fast-food restaurants are, in fact, *'lead[ing] consumers to (1) underestimate the number of calories contained in their main dishes and (2) order higher-calorie side dishes, drinks, or desserts'* (2007: 302). The authors contend that these cognitive and behavioural outcomes deriving from healthy claims encourage 'undetected excessive calorie intake' that would not otherwise occur in less 'health-wise' food outlets. Aydinoglu and Krishna (2011), in an article entitled 'Guiltless Gluttony', also claim that caloric intake can be the outcome of perception after investigating how food size labels (such as small, medium, large) can affect quantity perceptions, and hence levels of consumption. Their findings suggest that *'consumers can continue to eat large sizes that are labelled as small and feel that they have not consumed too much'* (2011: 1109). The authors conclude that this result about *'unintended and uninformed over-consumption can clearly have dire consequences for health'* (2011: 1109).

Whether the (fat) consumer is seen as a victim or as misinformed, the marketplace is typically seen as promoting overconsumption. Similarly, Murray, Bui, and Stokes (2009) point that *'[f]or consumer researchers, the [obesity] phenomenon has become a symbol of overconsumption and it is in this sense that it represents the dysfunctions of our consumer culture'*. Commentators suggest that the market plays an important role by activating indulgence goals (Chandon & Wansink, 2007) (Chandon & Wansink, 2007) or failing to activate internal cues of self-control (Do Vale et al., 2008); by normalising oversized portions (Sharpe et al., 2008); by creating misleading 'health' or 'low-calorie' expectations (Chandon & Wansink, 2007); by misguiding consumers' judgement via packaging and labelling practices (Aydinoğlu & Krishna, 2011; Do Vale et al., 2008; Sharpe et al., 2008) or by failing to offer 'sensible' options that would otherwise undermine unhealthy selections (Chandon & Wansink, 2007; Howlett et al., 2009). In their article *'Does Marketing Products as Remedies Create "Get Out of Jail Free Cards?"'*, Bolton et al. (2006) deplore the offering of weight-control remedies as hindering consumers' risk-aversion and encouraging them to follow through with their high-fat food temptations. Finally, the marketplace is also seen as promoting low self-esteem – which has been noted as affecting cookie consumption as a coping mechanism – via the promotion of unattainable standards of slenderness (Smeesters et al., 2010).

According to their overconsumption verdict, consumer researchers often recommend ways in which marketers, health practitioners and policy makers may 'fight' obesity. These include dropping larger food portion sizes (Sharpe et al., 2008), altering restaurant menus (Chandon and Wansink 2007; Howlett, Burton et al. 2009), promoting consumer awareness (Bolton, Cohen et al. 2006; Chandon and Wansink 2007) and rendering accessible the necessary information to make 'healthy' decisions or 'mental budgets' (Chandon and Wansink 2007; Howlett, Burton et al. 2009; Krishnamurthy and Prokopec 2010). Authors like Bolton et al. (2006) call for regulation at the governmental level, for they see consumers (and wider society) as victims of bad marketplace practices. In stark opposition, authors like (Do Vale et al.) assert that *'[m]aybe the answer [to the obesity epidemic] lies in consumers taking responsibility for their consumption and monitoring internal cues of sufficiency rather than letting package size take control'* (2008: 389).

Morality behind the medical framing of fatness in Consumer Research

The pervasiveness of morality in the discourse of traditional consumer researchers who are concerned with ways to eradicate fatness is palpable. For instance, despite the fact that consumer researchers position their work around the ‘obesity epidemic’, and thus, the medical model – often favouring an objectivist perspective –, the discourse involved can also be noted as quite moralistic. Examples of such moralistic frames of reference can be observed in these late Journal of Consumer Research article titles (emphasis added): ‘Guiltless Gluttony: *The Asymmetric Effect of Size Labels on Size Perceptions and Consumption*’ (Aydinoğlu and Krishna 2011, emphasis added); ‘Resisting That Triple-Chocolate Cake: *Mental Budgets and Self-Control*’ (Krishnamurthy and Prokopec 2010, emphasis added); ‘Recalling Past Temptations: *An Information-Processing Perspective on the Dynamics of Self-Control*’ (Mukhopadhyay, Sengupta et al. 2008, emphasis added); ‘Flying under the Radar: *Perverse Package Size Effects on Consumption Self-Regulation*’ (Do Vale et al., 2008, emphasis added); and ‘Does Marketing Products as Remedies Create “Get Out of Jail Free Cards?”’ (Bolton et al., 2006, emphasis added) (an interesting allusion to fatness as a ‘jail’). The moral model pervades consumer researchers’ discourse on fatness in both the terminology used and the underlying assumptions made. An example of the involvement of a Judeo-Christian ethos can be seen in Do Vale, Pieters et al.’s 2008 article. Other than it being punctuated with terms such as ‘self-control’, ‘restraint’, ‘temptation’, ‘indulgence’ or ‘perverse’ (to qualify the effects of small packaging), these authors make statements such as ‘*opportunities for potentially big sins may prevent consumers from committing them, but importantly also how presumably small sins may sneakily backfire*’ (2008: 389, emphasis added). As is similar to other CR authors, these commentators are readily labelling food consumption (which is implied as leading to fatness) as a vile thing. They push their claim further by indicating that ‘*hedonic products trigger an urge for immediate consumption that needs to be restrained*’ (2008: 388), suggesting that there is an implicit (moral and consumer) need for abstemiousness. Further grounding their article in the moral model of social control, they use a biblical analogy – (Song of Solomon 2:15): ‘*[t]ake us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines*’ (2008: 381) – to assert that small undetected indulgences

can be heavy in consequence.

Moreover, whilst consumer researchers have studied behaviours allegedly contributing to weight gain and position their articles in the context of an 'obesity crisis', in most part they extrapolate from experiences made with students who (presumably, given that no further indications are given on their sizes) are representative of a vaguely 'average' student population in terms of weight. This remark should not be interpreted as an encouragement to revisit those experiments on 'actual' fat people, but rather is made to show how fat people are, paradoxically, often absent from the research into their own 'inadequate' consumption acts. They are merely assumed to be people who are, in essence, thin or average sized, but who have been inflated physically as a result of these alleged acts.

Traditional consumer researchers represent fatness as a granted negative construct that can be brought back into the realm of normalcy and desirability via proper consumption behaviours. This corpus of research thus positions the consumer as someone who needs (and wants) to be saved from fatness for the sake of their own well-being. This constant pathological and aetiological framing of fat consumers in positivist research – expressly designed for the sake of consumer welfare – can also have adverse effects on consumers' well-being (dignity, self-esteem, healthy body image), regardless of their size. However, there are alternative perspectives existing in the field of CR.

2.2.3 Alternative framings of fatness in Consumer Research

The political perspective points to some of the risks associated with consumer researchers 'fighting' the alleged obesity epidemic, and the moral considerations and negative consequences of 'embedding fat-phobia' in our own CR discourse. Adopting a constructivist stance like that of Sobal (1995) does reveal a degree of unaccounted bias in traditional CR. However, some consumer researchers of a more interpretative strand (as opposed to positivist) have been found to share affinities and theories with tenants of the political model of fatness.

The human body as a social construction, built notably via marketplace

discourse and consumption practices, has been examined in CR following the emergence of an interpretivist perspective in the field during the late 1980s and early 1990s (see, for instance, Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Consumer researchers have also contributed to the discourse and the work of sociologists and feminist/cultural critics, who have identified and investigated the commodification of the human body, as well as processes of idealisation and normalisation in marketing and visual culture (see, for instance, Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). The investigation of the body from this interpretative perspective still holds a peripheral position in marketing and consumer research, and even more so when regarded in the context of the fat body. The views of several researchers adopting a postpositivist perspective of fatness come from conference proceedings, rather than extended journal articles.

Thompson and Hirschman (1995) use a poststructuralist concept to highlight the influence that long-standing Judeo-Christian and Cartesian dualistic mindsets have on the way in which consumers envision and speak of their bodies and self, and how consumers engage in consumption practices such as dieting. Thompson and Hirschman (1998) further focus on the importance of 'obesity anxieties' at the cultural and personal level, given the pervasiveness of the ideology of slenderness. They contend that cultural conditioning, which, as they observe, starts at a very early age, is shaped by 'folk theories of morality' and the long-standing medicalisation of fatness, which contends that weight is a matter of self-will and discipline. They highlight that this conditioning makes both lay people and medical practitioners 'less receptive' to emerging aetiological theories about the genetic determination of weight, or those contesting 'many of the presumed correlations between obesity and heightened health risks' (1998: 410). Thompson and Hirschman thus speak of fatness as a construction, the understanding of which is dominated by a moral doctrine of ascetism. Therefore fatness pervades into the moral discourse, fluctuating with time in its significance – from being the means by which one is able to achieve 'spiritual fulfilment' (through weight loss) to being an unavoidable gateway beyond which one is promised 'happiness, empowerment, and success' (1998: 410). Thompson and Hirschman thus take a critical stance towards the common negative framing of fatness by both cultural and medical institutions.

Askegaard, Jensen, and Holt (1999) also adopt an alternative lens in investigating 'lipophobia': modern society's fear and maligning of fat. The authors focus on the cultural understanding of fat as food, whilst stressing that this very meaning is often embedded in the way consumers associate their body with notions of health, hedonism and beauty. They insinuate that not only are there other countervailing discourses, but that the current lipophobic discourse has, perhaps, emerged as a result of an exercise of power and should thus be investigated with suspicion. The authors depart from the traditional CR perspective on the malignation of fat, and adopt a standpoint where it is seen as a discursive construction. A few years later, Askegaard (2003, 2004) further emphasises the existence of oppositional perspectives that challenge the orthodoxy of the dominant medical discourse adopted by the governmental and commercial spheres. Specifically, he highlights the lack of consensus at the medical level around the significance of the 'obesity epidemic' and reports the existence of health and well-being perspectives that stress the importance of body self-esteem, as well as those of communities and media outlets that believe in and promote beauty at every size (2004). Askegaard (2003) focuses on 'typical' consumers' relationship with 'fat' as mediated by conflicts such as hedonism versus ascetism, and indulgence versus health. He thus highlights not only the tension between these conflicting (and highly marketed) messages, but the potential of lipophobic discourses to generate what he terms a 'food scare' which can problematise one's 'healthy' relationship with food. Later, the author (2004) moves on from a focus on 'typical' consumers towards larger consumer's relationship with conflicting discourses about the status of the 'fat body'; thus initiating one of the first attempts at investigating the subjective perspectives of larger consumers in the field of CR. This novel perspective was continued by Murray et al. (2009), Scaraboto and Fischer (2010), Scaraboto, Fischer, and Blanchette (2010) and Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), who too focus on the perspectives of larger individuals or members of the fat acceptance community.

Murray et al. (2009) criticise the medical model for lacking empathy towards 'obese' individuals and not giving the full picture of the ongoing 'obesity epidemic'. They have thus endeavoured to investigate how the day-to-day corporeal experience of 'obese' consumers (along with the investigation of certain macro perspectives such

as evolution, culture and history) can be used to develop novel, more empathic explanations of 'obesity' and of the 'obesity epidemic'. The authors take a critical stance towards the socially constructed medical discourse on fatness and ultimately observe that obesity is the outcome of forgotten factors such as the post-war *'waste-not' sensibility towards food, as well as 'dramatic lifestyle changes' in our contemporary context, leading towards '[e]xhaustion, [and] over-consumption'* (2009: 839). However, though they refrain from engaging in the pathological discourse (obesity as a disease or as a risk factor), the authors adopt an aetiological perspective on fatness (factors contributing to 'obesity'), which can be interpreted as still embedded in the negative medical problematisation of fatness.

Scaraboto et al. (2010) also dealt with the notion of fatness whilst investigating the interpretation of paradoxical consumer products (products that allegedly challenge stigma but, rather, exploit that stigma as a commercial opportunity). Basing their interpretation on the writings of bloggers from online fat and size acceptance communities, the authors focus on how these ambiguous media products can give rise to a range of similarly contradictory readings. They highlight how members of these online communities engage in 'purification' strategies to psychologically emphasise the desirable aspects of the paradoxical products and build upon these positive meanings by coming up with their own alternative media product. In a similar vein, Scaraboto and Fischer (2009) engaged with the topic of fat agency whilst investigating collective stigma management in the context of an online fat acceptance community. They focused on the community's active attempts to deal with stigmatising marketing practices as well as highlighting instances where members of fat acceptance communities have come to influence the market (in terms of offering and representation). The authors note the potential role of fashion as a means of challenging the stigma of fatness and 'achieving mainstream insertion'. In their 2013 article, the authors present the strategies used by fat individuals – fat fashion bloggers, dubbed as 'fatshionistas', more specifically – as a means to seek greater legitimacy for larger individuals in the mainstream fashion industry. These strategies range from *'appealing to institutional logics, publicizing desirable institutional innovations and persistent institutional impediments, and allying with more powerful institutional actors'* (2013: 1236). For instance, fatshionistas appeal to the morality and legal righteousness of the retailers by problematising their discriminatory fashion offerings.

They also appeal to the business logic by pointing to the lucrative potential of the plus-size segment as well as alluding to the art logic by showing, with their carefully crafted fashion imagery, *'that consumers who are fat can consume fashion in ways that resonate with the artistry valued in the industry'* (2013: 1247). The authors discuss here in more depth how larger consumers are greatly affected by the marketplace structure and that the extent to which they can change the market is mediated by their 'embedded agency', or legitimacy in that market structure. However, building on the case of 'fatshionistas' whose compelling rhetoric and images have attracted important audience and influenced 'plus-size' clothing offerings, Scaraboto and Fischer's study highlights how larger consumers can also harness the power and logic associated with their embeddedness in alternative movements (such as fat/size acceptance) to effectively instigate changes in more receptive sections of the marketplace (2013: 1254).

2.3 Ethical issues in representation

As an institution fuelled by capitalistic power, marketing representation holds a strong cultural presence and is seen as shaping the way we understand identity markers – ours and those of others – such as gender, ethnicity and the body (Bordo, 2003; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Kacen, 2000; Orbach, 2009; Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004; Synnott, 1993). This shaping influence brings Borgerson and Schroeder (2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, Schroeder and Borgerson 2005) to point out the ethical concerns surrounding the practices of representing certain identity categories in the marketplace.

Schroeder and Borgerson (ibid) argue that the seemingly benign, enduring marketplace representation of certain identity categories may shape simplistic understandings of these people and serve as a means to maintain them in a lower hierarchical position. The authors use the example of the constant depiction of Hawaiian people (especially women) as candid and living a simple life. In this example, the commonplace representation fosters the idea that Hawaiian people are simple-minded, less important and available to entertain the pleasure of Western consumers.

A big part of the problem is that the repetitive use of typified images may *'increase the probability of human subjects interpreting what they experience or have*

represented to them as (stereo) typical' (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005: 584). In other words, the repetition of typified marketing representations (often with sexist or racist undertones) may be assumed to represent 'reality', and may constrain understanding of the world and the complexities of the identities involved. According to the authors, this likelihood is increased with a human tendency towards 'epistemic closure': a philosophical principle and mental process that *'abstracts and condenses characteristics that create a familiar identity or pattern for beings of a kind'* (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005: 584). The process of epistemic closure misleads individuals into thinking that the other can be, or indeed is, known 'completely'. Epistemic closure brings individuals to forsake the idea that the typecast other is a unique and complex human being and limits the scope of mutual interactions or relationships (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005)

The notion of epistemic closure is, of course, also relevant to the notion of representation in research, or in research-related outputs (such as news reports, for instance). Because the current understanding of fatness is often originating from objectivist research with a pathological perspective, it is necessary to consider notions of the construction of knowledge, as well as whose knowledge is valid (i.e. research epistemology). As we have seen, the dominant perspective used to study fuller-figured individuals in consumer research (and beyond) is objectivist, and claims to know fat individuals without accounting for their subjective perspectives. Just like the issue of epistemic closure in visual representation discussed by Borgerson and Schroeder, these research conventions can result in further setting the negative understanding of fat individuals and lead researchers, and society at large, to think that they completely 'know' fat individuals on the basis of their appearance. Several of the issues of representation of fat individuals can be paralleled with the epistemological concerns associated with the study of oppressed and/or marginalised groups explored by poststructuralist feminist researchers.

The authors warn marketing practitioners against the danger of constantly using typified representations, and point to four practices commonly found in marketplace representations of individuals or groups: namely practices of 'idealisation', 'exoticisation' (or othering), 'face-ism' and 'absence' (Schroeder and Borgerson 2005).

According to Borgerson and Schroeder, *[t]he issue of “idealisation” is associated with the habit of perpetually using and reasserting culturally-valued, “ideal” types: “young, thin models, unrealistic scenarios, or unattainable goals”* (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005: 267). The authors associate the pervasive, homogenised images of beauty with dissatisfaction and self-loathing that can begin at an early age. They also point to the issue of ‘exoticisation’, epitomised by the case of the Hawaiians, referring to it as the process of *‘making someone appear exotic, strange, or different in ways that call attention to certain identity characteristics, such as skin colour, dress, or appearance’*. Whilst exoticisation may seem benign, or even flattering, *‘it invokes a long history of Orientalism that undermines and undervalues the intellectual capacities and human qualities of those labelled “exotic”* (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005: 271). Exoticised images can be seen as the product of power imbalances; in this case, between the (male) ‘civilized’ Westerner and the (female) ‘primitive’ other.

Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) also highlight the tendency to more prominently display the heads and faces of male individuals than those of women, who are generally represented with more emphasis on the body. This practice, coined as ‘face-ism’ by Archer, Iritani, Kimes, and Barrios (1983), was demonstrated to be associated with the creation by viewers of inferences of greater intelligence with those represented having a greater head-to-body ratio. In a Western context, this process operates in conjunction with the views that the head is a ‘higher’ construct than the body, for it is considered as the seat of the soul and rationality. Conversely, the representation of females with more emphasis on their bodily attributes – even in contexts where a female is famous by virtue of her intellect, for instance – creates the impression that these women are less intelligent than their male counterparts.

Finally, Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) also discuss the practice of exclusion where certain individuals (such as Black, Hispanic or Asian people, individuals affected by a disability, etc.) are very rarely, or never, depicted, whether it be in the visual culture arena generally, or in a range of roles and positions. This ‘absence’ constrains the possible meanings associated with the under-represented, or unrepresented groups of individuals, whilst also constraining the interpretations one may make of them, particularly in light of the interplay of epistemic closure. The authors also raise awareness of the practice of ‘token’ inclusion, often informed by

seemingly wholesome, but typified, representations which can be associated with the practice of 'exoticisation'.

Borgerson and Schroeder's ethical issues in representation can be readily linked with the practices of representing fatness, not only in the marketplace, but in research generally. Fatness, as an object of loathing or laughter – or a grotesque 'other' portrayed by means of its association with outlandish consumption –, is often used as a backdrop to support an 'ideal' of slenderness. The 'before and after' photos promoting weight-loss or fitness solutions are also exemplary of the practice of positioning fatness as an unwanted 'before' that serves to promote a better, 'idealised' after (Levy-Navarro, 2008, 2009). As Braziel and LeBesco put it:

Whereas the 'thin body' manifests the quintessential commodity in American culture (...) the 'fat body' is the taboo, verboten site around which other commodities proliferate (...) The fat body is simultaneously produced and abnegated through this very proliferation of commodities: each product alludes to the fat body as the marker of its capitalistic circulation, but also resists and erodes that marked body (...) These diets and dietary products (...) are designed for the purpose of eliminating or preventing the very object that they signify, the fat body. (2001: 6-7)

Thus, the fat body is not only used to support the ideal slender body, but it is also 'erased' as a possible, acceptable identity, either via its lack of positive representation, or by the solutions designed (literally) to eradicate it. The practice of erasure can be further epitomised by diet advertisements in which a slender person stands triumphant in her 'previous', now oversized trousers (suggesting the ridding of a previous, impostor fat identity). Finally, an extreme manifestation of face-ism is most vivid by the use of the image of the 'headless fatty' referred to earlier. The depicted fat individual is 'beheaded' – and thus seemingly devoid of intelligence, soul or humanity – to focus on his/her distinctive, 'grotesque' body.

In summary, Borgerson and Schroeder raise ethical issues in representation, with practices of 'idealisation', 'exoticisation', (or 'othering'), 'face-ism' and 'absence' (2005). These typified images, involved in a process of epistemic closure, limit the

ideas and meanings associated with certain identities and sustain power imbalances for those represented in a demeaning light. These practices may be associated with dehumanisation, stigmatisation and discrimination, and can be seen as having limitative effects on the life chances and potential of those depicted. The authors encourage marketing practitioners to become more aware and critical of visual conventions and to explore the idea of 'poly-rhetoric' for the sake of more ethical, open and dignifying practices of representation. Using the work of Houston Wood (1999), Borgerson and Schroeder define 'poly-rhetoric' '*as the attempt to conceptualize how communication might function if marginalised groups had greater access to mass media's representational power*' (2008: 101).

3. Gap and research questions

In the previous Literature Review chapter, I have pointed to how fatness, rather than being an objective medical fact, can be seen as a social construction. The work of medical anthropologist Sobal (1995) has enabled the identification of three models or discourses on fatness: the moral, the medical and the political. The medical discourse – with the ongoing ‘war on obesity’ – is arguably dominating the way fatness is currently envisioned in contemporary Western society.

Importantly, the issue of social/individual welfare is central in all three models. Whilst according to a Judeo-Christian moral perspective fatness needs to be eradicated for the sake of moral ‘salvation’, in the medical perspective, fatness needs to be cured to achieve a ‘healthy’ body. In both the moral and medical model, slenderness – assumed to be the outcome of a righteous self-controlled lifestyle, or an active, nutritionally balanced and genetically-sound body – is seen as a guarantor, and even metonym of moral and/or medical welfare. The political framing of fatness, however, suggests that its moral and medical problematising can be detrimental to the well-being of larger individuals. This focus on a narrow range of sizes as a marker for moral and medical adequacy is seen as far too simplistic. It is also involved in a typecasting process whereby larger individuals are pigeonholed as unworthy, irresponsible, unhealthy, and even deadly. According to the two dominant models, guilt, fear, vulnerability based on low self-esteem, and social discrimination are seen as positive drivers to help individuals achieve moral and medical salvation upon the achievement of an ideal weight (see for instance Callahan, 2013; Moisió & Beruchashvili, 2010). Conversely, proponents of the political model point to these effects – arising from a negative social framing of fatness – as pressing issues of welfare in and for themselves. Similarly, in this research, I adopt a vision of ‘welfare’ and individual ‘well-being’ as one where individuals entertain a sense of harmony with themselves and their bodies. My vision of welfare based on size acceptance is also decidedly in favour of health (and not ‘pro-obesity’ as Moisió and Beruchashvili (2010) would put it⁵). Whilst my vision of size acceptance is not incommensurable with health

⁵ Moisió et al. contrast the quest for an ideal weight with a perspective they term as ‘pro-obesity’ which implies a ‘pathological’ component that is at odds with the more deliberately, politically neutral Size/Fat Acceptance Movement. Furthermore, whilst the Fat Acceptance Movement is sometimes dubbed as ‘pro-fat’, it is generally

– quite the opposite – I am reluctant to position this thesis as part of a quest for well-being based on physical health. Rather, my aim is to focus on a more feminist-political understanding of well-being as defined by the achievement of self-esteem, human dignity and legitimacy.

Overall, the gap left by previous researchers in CR lies in the lack of inclusion of the perspectives of larger individuals relating to the ways they make sense of their selves, bodies and well-being. I contend that, from a political feminist standpoint, including these missing perspectives is a means to acknowledge their humanity and legitimacy, and a way to inspire more humane, ethical depictions of larger individuals in the marketplace (and research).

As seen in the work of Schroeder and Borgerson (2005), some of the ethical issues associated with the problematic absence or representation of fat individuals can undermine people's dignity, feeling of ontological legitimacy and can have real-life effects on the welfare of people deemed as 'too fat' by society or by themselves. The authors suggest including the perspectives of marginalised individuals as a means to offset market-dominated standardised, and thus detrimental, representations of identities. Building on their work, I propose that including the perspectives of 'everyday' fuller-figured individuals in the act of marketplace representation is important for the sake of their human dignity and legitimacy, as well as for their more general well-being. Against this backdrop, the overarching research interrogation is as follows:

What public images and meanings do lay fuller-figured individuals want to convey of themselves? And consequently, 'what are their personal meanings/conceptions of their selves, bodies and well-being?'

The emphasis on including 'fuller-figured' individuals may be contentious, but it comes from the belief that we cannot assume that just anybody (who does not necessarily

done so in a perspective of acceptance and appreciation, as opposed to a quest for fatness. The movement Health At Every Size, which encourages active/balanced lifestyle, also finds numerous supporters as part of the Size and Fat Acceptance Movement. In this sense, size and fat acceptance should not be assumed to be at odd with a quest for health.

qualify or at least identify as being larger in the normative sense) can account for the 'reality' and experience of being bigger, as it is generally done in CR research positioned as part of the 'war on obesity'. Furthermore, seeking the perspective of 'everyday' larger individuals can be seen as a way to acknowledge their *'ability (...) to participate in the creation of meaning (...) through the discursive processes of communication and politics'* (LeBesco 2004: 14).

I also want to clarify my use of the term 'lay'. The term 'lay' ("Lay, adj. and n. 9,"), from 'layman', is often used in academia to refer to individuals 'without professional or specialized knowledge in a particular subject'. I use the term here to refer to actual (as opposed to fictional, or imagined) individuals, who have not been specifically 'schooled' in the thoughts of the size/fat acceptance movement. I contrast 'lay' fuller-figured individuals with larger-sized public figures, whose public appearance and performance is core to their profession. Whilst decidedly interesting, their relationship and performance of size have already been subjected to numerous analyses in fat studies, and yet very little work has been conducted with 'everyday' individuals. However, as this will become clearer in my epistemological framework, the emphasis on the term 'lay' should not be assumed to mean that these individuals are not 'experts' in their own lived experience. The involvement of 'lay fuller-figured individuals' addresses a gap left in fat studies scholarship where most of the work has been concerned with activists and members of the size/fat acceptance movement, public figures, TV, movie and literary characters 'of size', or fat studies scholars themselves.

Investigating the lived experiences and self-understandings of 'lay' individuals – generally dubbed as consumers – is a popular emphasis in more interpretive circles of consumer research, such as the stream of research associated with Consumer Culture Theories (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Having said this, as previously shown, very little emphasis has been put in CR, including CCT, on the lived experiences and self-understandings of 'lay' larger individuals.

Furthermore, whilst 'making visual representations more inclusive of the perspective of those it depicts' has been identified as an important ethical challenge, no research in either CR or fat studies has, to my knowledge, focused on the way

individuals – larger, marginalised, or otherwise – can envision their presentation in visual culture, when given the power to do so. As such, the research questions ‘*What public images and meanings do lay fuller-figured individuals want to convey of themselves?*’ and ‘*What are their personal meanings/conceptions of their selves, bodies and well-being?*’ can be seen as a departure from traditional CR perspective, offering avenues to inspire alternative modes of representation in the marketplace and novel understandings for consumer research. Whilst paying attention to the ability of larger individuals to create images and meanings for themselves is important for the sake of their human dignity, legitimacy and potential well-being, eliciting these meanings also addresses a knowledge gap present in CR, where researchers have generally overlooked the perspective of larger individuals, particularly with regards to the ways they make sense of their selves, bodies and well-being. Seeking these perspectives will thus, by the same token, enrich our CR understanding of these consumers and enable us to identify discourses used to achieve a sense of harmony (legitimacy, well-being) in spite of their alleged medical and moral ‘inadequacy’. Looking into their understandings of the self, the body and well-being will also provide important insights for the consideration of transformative consumer researchers or those more generally interested in the social marketing of health.

Though CCT researchers have given a special emphasis to the role of objects – but also recently, online hyperlinks (Schau & Gilly, 2003) – for the purpose of self-presentation, or identity management (to use the term by Goffman, 1959), less attention has been given to the self-presentation of consumers’ identities and bodies via the adoption of the same means used to represent them in visual culture (such as photography, video and research accounts). Whilst researchers in CCT have shown interest in consumers’ responses to marketplace messages and ideologies (including the promotion of slender ideals), as well as in the consequences and internalisation of current representational practices, very little has been researched in the way consumers (let alone stigmatised or fuller-figured ones) would like to see their embodied identities represented in the marketplace imagery⁶, supposing they had the

⁶ I use the term marketplace imagery to refer to advertising imagery, but also, more generally, to refer to mass-mediated visual outputs such as TV shows, films, newspapers and reports, magazines, books, and displays entering the visual culture arena via the marketplace, and as such, susceptible to bear its influence.

power to do so.

Of course, implicit issues (financial, resource-based, technical and political ones, namely) may generally hinder individuals' full access to the means used to fashion their representation in the marketplace. However, this does not mean that a greater awareness of individuals' perspectives is unnecessary; quite the opposite, especially if integrated as part of a field of scholarship traditionally aimed at informing marketplace practices. As argued by Murray and Ozanne, 'consumer researchers have a role to play in making society better by considering whether a program of consumer research can be designed to facilitate social awareness and change' (1991: 129).

Valuing the perspectives of larger individuals – as with any individual – does not imply the belief that these individuals' perspectives are fully independent, emancipated, and unaltered by dominant (and perhaps damaging) representational conventions and discourses either. Nonetheless, I believe that involving the forgotten subjective perspectives of 'larger' individuals can contribute to improving the scope of understanding and representations, traditionally contrived by an objectivist focus when researching, trying to make sense of, and representing larger individuals in CR.

Moreover, characteristic of the main research question is a step back from the marketplace 'domination' in the driving of this research, to value the creative perspectives of participants. It is generally thought in more interpretive circles of CR, that consumers deploy creativity whilst interpreting marketplace messages and products and by using them to construct their self-image/identities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). However, I believe that restraining our view of these creative capacities to the interpretation and use of market-generated ideas is limitative for a broader understanding of individual identities and aspirations. This limitation of a marketplace focus (which frames the individual as first and foremost a consumer) becomes explicit with the case of fuller-figured individuals. Firstly, the sole focus on market-generated products such as 'fast food' or diet products implies that these products' pre-associated meanings (a fast, 'mindless' food option, or an ideal of slenderness, for instance) tend to elicit a certain type of narrative (imbued with guilt for the participants) and dominate our understandings of these individuals. Secondly,

delving into how individuals feel about products or messages that 'expel' them, or that are unfit for them (such as limited-sized fashion, and normative body/gendered imagery), limits our understanding of the varied ways these participants can otherwise envision their bodies/identities, and of what could be, to them, suitable marketplace or self-generated alternatives. In sum, instead of focusing on the way market-generated products or ideas are interpreted by consumers, I believe investigating what messages/depictions consumers would like to generate for the marketplace or themselves could also provide for an insightful contribution to CR scholarship.

Finally, whilst the core question behind this research revolves around the issue of representation of larger individuals in the marketplace – and the meanings they give to their selves, bodies and well-being - I am also aware of and seek to address the issue of representation in research practices. In a similar manner to marketplace representations, research accounts that disregard the human subjectivity of the groups they involve can also be responsible for epistemically closed readings of individuals. The implications of our ways of engaging with the concept of 'fat individuals' in our research is all the more important because it is intended (to a certain extent) to inform market practices. If the negative representation of fatness remains unchallenged within our research representation practices, it is unlikely that the market will question their own practices of depiction, especially considering their perceived commercial stake in sustaining body-dissatisfaction in consumers via the promotion of elitist body ideals. Thus, including the perspectives of 'lay' fuller-figured individuals in the act of research representation is equally important, if not more so in the context of this research project. This can be bridged with the work of Hogg, Bettany, and Long (2000), who argue for the inclusion of the perspectives – or 'voices' – of marginalised individuals in the dialogue of research, as a core feminist research principle. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

On the whole, whilst it is impossible to exhaustively account for all the perspectives of 'lay' fuller-figured individuals, my aim is to bring an array of different voices to the dialogue. Whilst I am seeking to uncover the variegated meanings participants use to refer to their selves and bodies, I pay special attention to the meanings/discourses used by the participants to position themselves as legitimate, in contrast with the widespread idea that they necessarily feel inadequate due to their size. Uncovering

possible discourses which enable them to feel legitimate, in spite of their non-conformity with the current slender ideal, can prove insightful when addressing self-esteem issues raised in consumer research.

4. Theoretical and epistemological framework

In this chapter, I expose and discuss my theoretical and epistemological position and highlight important considerations for the development of my methodological approach as well as my critical-reflexive analysis.

On the theoretical side, this research stems from a feminist critique of the objectification of the fat identity/body (in both marketplace imagery and research), as well as a poststructuralist understanding of the (fat) body/identity/subjectivity. Conforming to the call of feminist researchers to integrate alternative, forgotten or disenfranchised perspectives, this research aims to integrate fuller-figured individuals' perspectives.

On the epistemological side, I adopt feminist ontological and epistemological guidelines in order to craft a research approach that empirically values fuller-figured perspectives and, hopefully, contributes to their dignity in representation. However, whilst I strive to favour the participants' dignity and legitimacy within this research process, what I intend to do is less to 'liberate' or 'emancipate' participants, and more to stress researchers' responsibility when dealing with representation practices (that in turn may have an impact on people's relationships with the self/body).

In the context of this research, a feminist marketing lens not only lights up numerous critique points in the way fatness is currently represented in research but also highlights ways of improving CR practices and, to some extent, marketing practices. Whereas the marketplace has been identified as a core battleground for fat political advances (with regards to the representation of fuller-figured individuals, but also what is offered to them as goods and services), improvements in this sphere can hardly happen at a more mainstream scale without addressing the problems inherent in the research studies that are generally designed to provide the critiques and knowledge-base for marketing practice.

4.1. Theoretical framework: Feminist research and poststructuralism

In the field of marketing and CR, researchers have used a feminist lens to critique the underlying philosophies (ideologies, ontologies) and epistemologies implied in the current involvement of women and members of other disenfranchised groups in our field of research (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Hirschman, 1993; Hogg et al., 2000; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994). Most work within this field can be seen as part of a 'feminist marketing' research programme (Hogg et al., 2000: 112). As a prime characteristic, this 'feminist marketing' approach is not designed per se to undermine the liberal undertone of the marketing/CR agenda, but rather, is intended as a productive or constructive feminist critique that 'contributes to the discipline's advancement from the boundaries of its own ideology' (Hogg et al., 2000: 112).

Whilst different feminist perspectives coexist, broadly speaking:

[I]t is commonly agreed that a feminist is one who believes there are inequities in contemporary society that dis-advantage women relative to men and who supports the goal of eradicating these inequities. (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 519)

Feminists typically seek to address issues such as inequality and discrimination in terms of opportunities, education, wages and health-care, as well as working towards the legitimisation and improvement of women's particular circumstances (namely with regards to women's health, maternity and abortion rights) (Prasad, 2005). A core issue of feminism which is particularly relevant to marketing and consumer research is the objectification of women's bodies (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2008; Prasad, 2005), or 'the misrepresentation of the feminine as 'other' or 'object'' (Joy & Venkatesh, 1994: 338). Whilst traditional marketing has been depicting women as 'objects' of sexual desire/pleasure or subordination, traditional CR has generally been representing female consumers as 'objects' of knowledge that can be fully understood and represented rationally by the researcher (Bristor & Fischer, 1993). Postpositivist feminists criticise social science's (and, by extension, CR's) focus on objectivity, which is seen as a patriarchal ideal and pretention (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Hirschman, 1993; Hogg et al., 2000; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Prasad, 2005). Within this paradigm, constructs such as mind and rationality

have been historically associated with men, whereas concepts such as body and emotionality have been coded as female. Accordingly, in CR more particularly, women, whose traditional role and position is at home (seen as a locus of consumption), have been characterised as prime consumers, and 'objects' of knowledge for consumer researchers (who happen to be men, traditionally). The association between the 'male knower' and the 'known female' has been determining in traditional CR where male researchers have put an important focus on studying (and henceforth claiming to know) female shoppers/homemakers (Bristor & Fischer, 1993).

The result is an understanding of the world dominated by a male perspective (a male 'objectivity') and set of masculine interests. Thus, postpositivist feminists generally reject the notion of objectivity for '[it] is not a transcendent truth-seeking principle, but derives from the particularistic experiences of dominant males in capitalist society' (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 1990: 326 cited by Prasad 2005). They instead value the notion of subjectivity and 'voice', but in different ways according to their feminist strand.

4.1.1. Three feminist positions

Whilst there is not a clear-cut distinction between every feminist strand, there are some significant differences in terms of philosophical (ontological and epistemological) underpinnings that inform three major perspectives: 'liberal', 'women's voice/experience feminists' (WV/E) and 'poststructuralist' (aka 'postmodern') feminists.

Liberal feminism does not tend to question the notion of objectivity in research (for women and men are seen as objectively the same in terms of rationality) and thus 'does not depart from the ontological and epistemological positions of positivism' (Prasad, 2005). Liberal feminists do, however, consider differently the possibility of ever attaining an 'objective truth'. They generally hold that women and men have the same cognitive/emotive make-up: differences being the outcome of gender socialisation (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Prasad, 2005). They emphasise that women should be given the same opportunities as men for they are equally suited in terms of rationality.

Conversely, WV/E and poststructuralist feminists adopt a postpositivist research stance, challenging the possibility of ever being objective, neutral, or impactless as a researcher. WV/E argue that being a woman entails a different experience and perspective (whether this is the outcome of biology or socialisation) (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Prasad, 2005). This feminist strand holds that a distinct woman's perspective (and issues of interest) has been undervalued and left out. More importantly, *'WV/E feminists' emphasise that 'men's experience and value systems are institutionalized as normal, and women's deviations from male standards are either completely overlooked or judged as being deviant'* (Prasad, 2005: 159). Thus, WV/E feminists emphasise the need to complete the picture by privileging women's voices and experience in research.

Whilst liberal and WV/E feminists tend to have a set notion of 'femaleness' (whether it be equal, similar to men, or distinct), poststructuralist feminists see gender and gendered subjectivity as fluctuating according to historical discourses and use of language (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Prasad, 2005). (Patriarchal) objectivity is not only seen as limitative and limited, but as illusive. According to this view, a researcher's ability to perceive the world is inherently subjective and thus biased by both their personal lens and that of the field they evolve in. This is consistent with more general postpositivist critiques that *'no science is objective and what counts as valid knowledge is relative to programmatic standards and commitments'* (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 522). Poststructuralists generally consider subjectivity as *'open to constitution and reconstitution, through discourse'* (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 521). Given the constructed nature of subjectivity, and of what is perceived as 'knowledge' and 'reality', poststructuralist feminists generally set out to dislodge powerful discourses; an act which they see as a prerequisite to effective social changes:

Although they regard powerful discourses as difficult to dislodge, they also insist that discursive change is possible and is one of the primary tasks of feminists who are engaging in making society more comfortable for women. (Prasad, 2005: 164-165)

Dislodging discourse may happen by highlighting the arbitrariness of the current order, or with the emergence of resistant or alternative subjective accounts. Regarding potential emancipatory or liberating effects, however, poststructuralist feminists think that an oppressive 'hegemonic order' is always reversed to the profit of another 'hegemonic order' (Prasad, 2005). Thus, any account 'tends to empower some and disadvantage others' (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 524). Yet, the importance of alternative perspectives (or voices) in research is emphasised in order to transcend the limitations of an objectivist androcentric perspective.

4.1.2. From women to 'fat individuals'

Feminist critiques of the representation of women in visual culture and research are akin to critiques about the representation of fat individuals as well as other members of marginalised or minority groups, whether female or male. Fat studies scholars and size acceptance activists, in the same vein as scholars and activists dealing with issues of disability and multiculturalism, have used a feminist lens in order to criticise the pervasive negative representation of fat individuals, male and female, within various mass-mediated forms (see for instance Hartley 2001 and Tischner 2013). As argued by Orbach in her eponymous classic book, 'Fat is a feminist issue' (1978, 2006)⁷. This is because the pressure on women to maintain a petite silhouette (as part of the wider beauty ideology) can be read as a form of subordination, both physical and psychological, to their male counterpart (see also Bordo, 1993 and Hartley, 2001). Overall, a feminist lens (both in research and as a social/cultural critique) addresses women's concerns, but also, by extension, those of other disenfranchised groups.

4.2. Use of poststructuralist concepts

In many respects, this research is informed by a poststructuralist theoretical perspective, beyond structuralist feminism as such. Because poststructuralists consider reality as socially constructed and arbitrated by language, concepts such as identity, gender, disability, ethnicity or fatness are not seen as objective facts or essential truths but, rather, as constructs shaped over time by discourses and use of

⁷ However, unlike fat studies scholars, psychotherapist Orbach is supporting the idea that fatness is problematic, and the outcome of compulsive eating. Furthermore, she makes a contentious claim that 'compulsive eating is linked to a desire to get fat' and that this fact is 'often overlooked or misunderstood by compulsive eaters'. Overeating is seen as a subconscious transgression of the patriarchal order (2006: 35).

language.

'Discourse' and 'language' are used in their broader sense here, and can take the form of speech or writing as well as consumption practices and 'day-to-day' identity performances (see Butler's discussion on gender performances (1990)). In this sense, *'[p]oststructural critics use "discourse" more broadly as a generic referent to all communicative events in life and art'* (Stern, 1998: 3). Discourses become 'real' or, rather, constitutive of 'reality', as they are enacted through language.

For instance, the speech, or research writing, act of referring to a fat person as 'obese' can be interpreted as giving credential to the dominant medico-pathological view of fatness and contributing in framing the way we think of this individual as either a victim or someone deserving moral castigation. According to the Foucauldian mindset, discourses also govern the measures taken towards certain categories of individuals and hence, can affect the way one envisions or experiences his/her identity.

This use of a 'political' poststructuralist perspective is consistent with the work of several fat studies scholars who see the fat identity as an idea (affected by dominant discourses idealising slenderness) requiring deconstruction and open to (re)interpretation (Braziel, 2001; Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; LeBesco, 2004; Owen, 2010; Tischner, 2013). A poststructuralist perspective, namely via discourse analysis, has also been adopted by more critical and/or feminist consumer researchers in order to highlight the constructed nature of marketplace, consumers' and consumer researchers' discourses, as well as their own influence in shaping certain kinds of consumer identity (see for instance Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Caruana, Crane, & Fitchett, 2008; Elliott & Ritson, 1999; Holt, 1997; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Conversely, other scholars in CR point to how consumers can take on alternative, sometimes seen as 'resistant', discursive positions made available by structural changes, or found at the confrontation/conflation of ideologies (see for instance Chrysochou, Askegaard, Grunert, & Kristensen, 2010; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Kristensen, Askegaard, & Jeppesen, 2013; Kristensen, Boye, & Askegaard, 2011; Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010; Thompson, 2005).

4.2.1. Poststructuralist understanding of identity and subjectivity

According to a poststructuralist perspective, identity, in terms of both position in the social sphere and self-understanding, is shaped by discourses and culture. Whereas past discourses and power structures made it so that individuals thought that they were bound by fate to a pre-determined identity or social position, it is increasingly believed, in contemporary Western society, that individuals are now free to create their identity (Shankar, Elliott, & Fitchett, 2009).

However, this sense of freedom – greatly shaped by the marketplace, which offers an increasing variety of individuating products, acting as meaning-making devices and as symbolic extensions of the self (Belk, 1988) – also comes accompanied with a heightened sense of pressure and responsibility in creating a ‘coherent self’, or in actualising one’s ‘better’ or ‘ideal’ self (Blanchette, 2013; Illouz, 2008; Karanika & Hogg, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Schouten, 1991). Identity can be seen as a project which requires reflexivity and personal investment in its construction, maintenance and updating (Askegaard, Gertsen, & Langer, 2002; Giddens, 1991; Shankar et al., 2009). As such, identity (and some of its components such as health and appearance) can now be perceived as a ‘tyranny of management’, as opposed to a ‘tyranny of fate’ (Askegaard et al., 2002, Kristensen et al., 2011).

The self also draws attention to the concepts of ‘subject’ or ‘subjectivity’ with reference to contextual, social and interpersonal dimensions of the human experience and, as such, are equally shaped by culture and power. Foucault, for instance, rejects the idea of a true essential self by suggesting that ‘subjectivity is always everywhere a fiction, and has no intrinsic reality or structure, neither one given to us at our birth or as a result of the relationships and experiences of our early lives’ (Mansfield, 2000: 64).

Because in poststructuralist thoughts, subjectivity is a fiction shaped by discourses, which are, by their very nature, open to adoption, deconstruction, hybridisation and thus mutation (via acts of speech or practices) it generates tensions and breakages, which can act as opportunities for resistance (Bristor & Fischer, 1993, Mansfield, 2000). However, these opportunities for resistance, which enable the adoption of alternative discursive positions, should not be mistaken as a case of

liberating the self from the broader system of power and discourses; these discourses are seen as the prerequisite/constituents for the self/subject to exist. According to Mansfield, who discusses the Foucauldian perspective:

Since there is no authentic or natural self that we can simply recover or struggle to liberate, subjects should be geared towards a dynamic self-creation, an experimental expansion of the possibilities of subjectivity in open defiance of the modes of being that are being laid down for us constantly in every moment of our day-to-day lives. (Mansfield 2000: 63)

In this research, I use the term 'subjectivity' in opposition to the term 'objectivity', but also, relatedly, to refer to individuals' capacities as *'thinking, feeling, acting, situated and embodied human beings'* (Henriques, Holloway, Unwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 2003: XV). Similarly, my use of the term 'subjectification', which refers to the constitution of the individual as a subject, should also be defined. Whilst in poststructuralist thoughts, subjectification is the outcome of the power dynamics between discourses, my focus on visual representations brings me to use it in a much more narrow (yet related) way, to refer to the fact that an individual is portrayed as a subject (in a 'subjectifying' manner), as opposed to an object (in an 'objectifying' manner). For instance, in her book 'Portraits and Persons', art philosopher Cynthia Freeland (2010) explains that to be considered as 'subjectifying' depictions of individuals:

[P]ortraits must refuse to treat [sitters] as things or as tools that are mere means to some end. 'Subjectification' is achieved in representations that show their sitters as independent beings that cannot be owned. They are unique and irreplaceable, active and autonomous, with intact physical boundaries. (Freeland, 2010: 205)

To Freeland (ibid), in order to move away from objectifying representations, the sitter/subject must be represented as an end instead of a means. This refers to the idea of representing a person for her own sake as opposed to using her as an object of desire, fear, laughter or revulsion. She must be depicted in a way where she is seen

as unique and irreplaceable, as opposed to depicted as a generic individual, in a way and context that supersedes her unique combination of inner traits. She must be seen as autonomous and sovereign, and as such, not coerced into a pre-established discourse or depiction on behalf of the photographer, or framed in a subaltern power position. She must be depicted as having boundaries, which is theoretically in opposition with portraying someone without her consent, in a voyeuristic, but also at times in the context of a sexually or otherwise abusive position. Finally, Freeland discusses the importance of representing someone as 'alive and active', which implies the acknowledgement, within the portrait, that the subject is inhabited by inner life, thoughts, drives and emotions. This framework proposed by Freeland is an ideal, which arguably can be tricky to achieve in a pure form, especially from an outside artist (but also researcher) position. Likewise, her framework sees subjectification and objectification as part of a continuum where representations may 'manifest a degree of both subjectification and objectification' (Freeland, 2010: 205). To make a bridge with the work of Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) who criticise the harmfulness of typecast, objectifying images on the identity of groups of individuals, it can be argued that the framework for subjectification offered by Freeland can point to conditions in the representation of individuals that may contribute in less epistemologically-closed readings.

4.2.2. Poststructuralist understanding of the body

The poststructuralist understanding of the body (including the gendered and fat body) arises from an appreciation of the influence of dominant doctrines and philosophies such as Greek, Judeo-Christian and Cartesian thinking on the Western 'metaphysical' mindset. According to this perspective, these doctrines and philosophies have had and still have a strong shaping influence on the way we consider, portray and live bodies and genders in our current Western society (Bordo, 2003; Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Kacen, 2000; Synnott, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). These currents contributed in fashioning dualities between the mind and the body, as well as between other constructs such as the masculine and the feminine. The body has been defined as antagonistic to the construct of the mind, which is considered to be the real harbour of the self (Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Synnott, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). This fundamental dichotomy shaping Western

metaphysics would have encouraged the construction of pervasive disembodied ideals and conventions, positioning the body as an entity which needs to be controlled by the mind in order to achieve 'disembodied transcendence' (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995: 143).

According to this perspective, the body, which needs to be separated from its experience in a quest for disembodiment, and controlled away from 'sinful' urges and emotions, is intertwined with the platonic halo effect where beauty is seen as equivalent to virtue, and ugliness, as suggesting wickedness (Synnott 1993). The appearance of the body thus needs to reflect the strength and nobility of the soul, which is manifest through the cultivating of passivity, ascetism and selflessness (Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Synnott, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Thompson & Hirschman, 1998) thought as creating a beautiful (slim) body.

4.2.3. Poststructuralist understanding of gender

In the poststructuralist feminist perspective, the fundamental mind/body hierarchy and dualism is a gendered one (Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Synnott, 1993); associating the 'low' body/emotion construct with femininity (long conceptualised as weak, by science, and fundamentally wicked by Judeo-Christianism and Greek thinking), and the 'high' mind/reason construct with masculinity (Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Synnott, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Thus, disembodied ideals would have been further applicable to women as means of redemption from this 'wickedness', and accordance with the likings of the man to whom she is subjugated due to her perceived 'weakness' (Synnott 1993). As discussed by Moisiu and Beruchashvili:

As already implicit in biblical depictions of Eve and Mary, popular cultural viewpoints proscribe women to evoke the language of confession and mark themselves as transgressors in their everyday lives (Spitzack 1990). In contrast, men, like the archetypal biblical Adam, are not marked by guilty consciousness and by the burden of the primal sin in the same manner. (2010: 859)

Over time, these ideals and conventions about femininity are said to have become so pervasive that they are often seen as a matter of nature (divine will/moral righteousness) and essence (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Synnott, 1993).

According to poststructuralist thinkers, the influence of Judeo-Christian and Cartesian thinking has contributed to the shaping of gender and body norms, or ideals, used heavily in our popular culture (Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Kacen, 2000; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). The idealisation of women depicted as ascetic, passive and selfless is commonplace in visual culture. Conversely, the fat woman is coded as undesirable for her association with the 'low' body. As seen with the issue of epistemic closure, these representational conventions or discourses shape the way we, as humans, experience and define ourselves. A mindset that refuses the body (experience and materiality) can be associated with identity tensions underlying body- and self-hatred.

In sum, according to poststructuralist thought, subjectivity, the self, the body and gender can be seen as shaped by dominant discourses, and experienced accordingly. Several scholars have discussed the pervasive influence of the Judeo-Christian moralistic discourse in current Western society. In the dominant Judeo-Christian view, the body is seen as an entity distinct from, and antagonistic to, the soul, the latter being seen as the real locus of identity. The body is treated with fear or contempt, and needs to be controlled to reach the full capacity of the mind/self. In parallel, the body and emotions have been culturally-coded as feminine entities, and contrasted with mind/reason, 'essentially' masculine constructs. As such, women have been thought to be more vulnerable to sinful existence, and requiring the exertion of greater self-control (implicit in virtues of passivity, motherliness, ascetism, temperance, etc.) to be deemed adequate.

However, other discourses are also at work in the shaping of subjectivities, which is seen, by poststructuralists, as an entity *'open to constitution or reconstitution, through discourse, each time we think or speak'* (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 521). This vision of subjectivity implies the possibility of adopting different discursive (or subject) positions enabled by the dynamic evolution and confrontation of discourses. This is consistent with the thoughts of fat studies scholars (such as Braziel & LeBesco, 2001;

LeBesco, 2004; Owen, 2010) who see the understanding of fat identity, currently heavily influenced by the moral and medical mindset, as an idea that can be deconstructed, reconstructed and that is open to (re)interpretation.

4.3. From theoretical to epistemological position

My ontological perspective as a researcher can best be described as subjectivist, which means that I see the perception of reality as altered by each individual's subjective lens. In this sense, I do not pretend that it is ever possible to reach objectivity, even by bringing in alternative perspectives. This is in sheer contrast with traditional research studies on fatness (framed as 'obesity' or 'overweight-ness') which contend that fat is a set and definite ontology, and that complete knowledge of fat individuals is possible.

I also consider that reality is constructed by language and socialisation, and that this constructivist understanding of reality is shaped by a dominant patriarchal worldview, which also has implications for the understanding of the body/fatness, along a feminist standpoint.

Understandings and experiences of fatness are shaped by socialisation with dominant discourses, such as the medical and moral problematisation of fatness. However, it is my belief that they could also be shaped by alternative meanings with fatness/fuller-figuredness, providing that these associations are given a chance to emerge. Valuing the different voices of larger individuals – or polyvocality – can contribute in enriching people's understanding of these individuals and defer epistemic closure: people's tendency to bundle others that seemingly share certain characteristics in familiar/simple typified categories (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005). This is precisely what this research aims for. In the long run, this polyvocality may also enable attention to be paid to polyrhetorics, or *'how communication might function if marginalised groups had greater access to mass media's representational power'* (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2008: 101), showing alternative possibilities and potentially giving rise to alternative orders.

I do consider, as per a feminist poststructuralist theoretical perspective, that identities/subjectivities (such as fatness) are fluid instead of set and fully representable. My epistemological perspective, however, is more feminist postpositivist than feminist poststructuralist as such. This is because my prime intent in this research is to bring the voice of fuller-figured individuals into the dialogue of research as opposed to scrutinising their accounts to further highlight 'patterns of domination' (which is a typical aim of feminist poststructuralist analysis). The goal here is to enable the emergence of alternative meanings of fuller-figuredness – which are presumed to be enabled (to a certain extent) when valuing the creative and embodied perspectives of fuller-figured individuals.

4.4. Epistemological framework

4.4.1. Involving the participants in the 'dialogue of research'

The term 'voice' commonly used by feminist authors is used here to designate an expression of subjectivity. Voice is not restricted to the designation of a form of 'speech'; it is used more generally as an expression that asserts the participants' embodied existence and subjectivity, including an acknowledgement of their own perspectives, interests, feelings, desires, opinions, concerns and embeddedness in social, historical and material contexts. Valuing the voice of the participant is a fundamental feminist endeavour of this research as a way of redressing their constant 'objectification'/'abjection' by the marketplace and academia.

The feminist principle of getting participants involved in the dialogue of research (Hogg et al., 2000) can be seen as a way of valuing their dignity and legitimacy. Participants' 'valid' voices enable them to contribute to the authoring of research which corresponds to their view of dignity. This notion of dialogue can be contrasted with the practice of 'representation'. Stern (1998) recalls how 'representation', as a modernist concept, is seen as set and definite, as opposed to the more postmodern, or poststructuralist, concepts of 'discourse' and 'dialogue'. The term 'representation' is closely associated with positivist research traditions; therefore it assumes a set, universal reality that can be reliably conveyed through an adequate act of representation (ibid). In this sense, the act of representing itself may be seen as objectifying and hindering dignity. Conversely, the concepts of 'discourse' and 'dialogue' are seen as more inter-subjective, open processes implying the co-construction of meanings between 'readers, writers, and those written about' (Stern, 1998:4). The notion of dialogue is much more in line with poststructuralists' problematisation of identity as single and fixed.

Thus, the feminist-inspired practice of 'getting the consumers in the dialogue' of research advocated by Hogg et al., (2000) (and extended to the marketplace) could be more astutely used to capture different participants' perspectives and contribute to promoting dignity and legitimacy of voice of fuller-figured individuals in the context of this research. Core to the project of getting members of disenfranchised groups involved in the 'dialogue of research' is this idea of giving central stage to the interests of the individuals or group in question. This can be contrasted with the traditional

approach in CR where research is designed to enlighten the market, and to support a more liberal/capitalist agenda (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Hirschman, 1993; Hogg et al., 2000), rather than to address the concerns and interests of the individuals.

Implications for this research

What I perceive as a fat/fuller-figured woman's interest or concern initially stemmed from my own experience and feeling of being misrepresented or absent in the marketplace of visual culture (and then in CR). This standpoint echoes the concerns of fat studies scholars, adherents to the size acceptance movement who associate themselves as fat and those of numerous friends, acquaintances and bloggers who have voiced their feelings of being unrepresented or misrepresented in the visual culture arena because of their shape, weight and size. In this sense, I genuinely believe that finding new ways of depicting fat or fuller-figured people, based on their perspectives, reflects the interests of many individuals and groups striving for more social legitimacy and dignity. Yet, I am also aware of this being a 'bias' on my part.

4.4.2. Relinquishing the 'expert' role

Seeing research as a true dialogue implies for the researcher to forsake his/her role as an 'expert' and, conversely, to consider participants as 'experts' of their own lives. Thus, feminist researchers generally value more equality and reciprocity (or fusion of perspectives) between the researcher and the participants. According to feminist research principles, researchers should relinquish their role as experts when possible, in the empirical context, but also in the act of data transformation and writing.

Wolcott (1994), coming from the field of anthropology of education, emphasises distinctions between 'description', 'analysis' and 'interpretation' in qualitative research, which are often used interchangeably or bundled and 'glossed' over as a process of analysis. The term analysis is used to designate what could be defined as the process of data transformation. Although not clear-cut nor mutually exclusive, these delineations appear to be consequential in terms of exerted authorial control. Wolcott defines the step of research 'description' – often the first step in the process of data transformation – as that of organising and reporting data. He highlights how 'purposiveness' is one of the key attributes of description, as it retells research

accounts in such a way to serve the intended purpose of the research. He does insist, however, on how even seemingly neutral descriptions are always imbued with value. According to postpositivist researchers, *'There is no such thing as immaculate perception, and there is no immaculate description either'* (1994: 15).

The step of 'analysis', which generally flows from description, aims to illuminate, in a very systematic way, important factors and the way they relate to one another. Importantly, analysis *'does more than merely hint at fact, however: it presumes to be fact'* (Wolcott 1994: 25). Analysis rests on knowledge conventions, which is well in line with the traditional objectivist/positivist mindset.

Finally, 'interpretation' may be the next step after analysis, or straight from description, and can be used as either the onset or the 'finale' of the research. Interpretation aims *'to make sense of what is going on, to reach out for understanding or explanation beyond the limits of what can be explained with the degree of certainty usually associated with analysis'* (1994: 10–11). Interpretation *'does not claim to be as convincingly or compulsively "scientific" as [analysis], being neither as loyal to nor restricted by observational data only'* (1994: 10).

Distinguishing between the three parts of the data transformation process, though not specifically discussed by feminist authors reviewed in this thesis, makes more sense in the context of feminist research. Feminist critics argue that scientists, using their experts' hat, or 'analytical affirmability' (to borrow the expression of Wolcott 1994: 24), renders women or members of disenfranchised groups as 'objects' of research that can be grasped entirely and represented faithfully. Choosing interpretation, and instead valuing 'interpretive plausibility' (1994: 24), suggests a form of humility as a researcher; an awareness that one's understanding of the world can only ever be a subjective perspective. Interpretation does not pretend to bring a clear answer to a problem. As argued by Wolcott, it is sometimes just as valid to *'leave your reader with a clearer sense of the problem in spite of the fact that you yourself feel no closer to the answer'* (1994: 44).

Implications for this research

Taking an authoritative claims-maker stance around fatness can be both presumptuous and detrimental when looking at the consequences of scientific portrayal of fat individuals. Thus, my first intent is to focus on description using participants' words and my own experience. I will thereafter offer one possible interpretation of these emergent meanings. My reading will not provide specific nor closed answers to the meanings of fuller-figuredness (for this fixity would be problematic from a poststructuralist perspective).

4.4.3. Involving participants as experts/collaborators

Concomitant with researchers relinquishing their 'expert' role is acknowledging the status of participants as 'people [who] are experts on their own lives' (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004: 911) and getting them involved in the authoring of research. This process of involving participants in this way – often referred to as participatory research – can happen quite early at the onset of the project and yield a significant amount of power to the participants. Participatory research has been known to involve participants as 'collaborators' (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008) in the process of developing relevant problematics, research questions and data-collection methods. Participants have also been involved as 'collaborators' in the process of collecting and interpreting the data, as well as in creating and disseminating the research outputs. However, Hogg et al. (2000) and Danieli and Woodhams (2005) warn against the illusion that research can ever be completely balanced between the researcher and the participants.

Implications for this research

It is my wish to involve the participants as much as possible in the authoring of this research, in order to include them in the dialogue and redress the 'objectivist' representation that is perpetually made of them. However, due to time constraints and the embeddedness of this research in the context of a PhD – where I have to demonstrate my ability at completing a research project – I will have to retain an important part of the authorial power. I will, however, try to be very clear about the allocation of this control, and acknowledge where possible the impact this may have had on the research outcome.

4.4.4. Pursuing an ideal of reciprocity

Involving the participants in the dialogue of research and valuing principles of reciprocity requires the participants to benefit, too. Consequently, several feminist researchers argue for the translation of participants' voices into formats that can be disseminated within that group and beyond – not solely within academic communities (Prasad 2005: 171). Thus, it is good practice to plan for research outputs that benefit the interests of the participants and extended community. This can be achieved in the form of alternative outputs such as exhibitions, videos, blogs or adapted publications.

Implications for this research

I believe it would be relevant to create a research output for the participants as a measure of reciprocity, but also one intended for the population at large, as well as image-makers and epistemology-makers, in order to offset the very situation challenged in this project: the absence, or perpetual negative depiction, of fuller-figured individuals.

4.4.5. Reflexivity about authorial control and researchers' interests

Hogg et al. (2000) emphasise the importance of 'reflexivity' as a means to ensure the involvement of the participants in the dialogue of research. Reflexivity can be seen as a core component and principle of feminist research (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Hogg et al., 2000; Prasad, 2005). Fonow and Cook define reflexivity at the epistemological level, as 'the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process' (1991: 2). Generally speaking, reflexivity acts as a means of identifying and addressing bias and influences that may otherwise hinder the goal of valuing the interests and voice of the participants in research.

Even inclusive research, carried out with the best of intentions, may fail to fully integrate participants' perspectives if researchers forsake the use of reflexivity:

[t]he control of the representation of the 'voices' lies clearly with the authors and the reviewers [and that] although the voices of the consumers are not entirely excluded – their representation is shaped by authorial control; and their impact

on the discourses in the field is necessarily restricted. (Hogg et al., 2000: 121)

As such, these research studies may unintentionally act as vehicles that convey the voice and interests of the epistemology-makers (authors and research institutions) and silence the perspectives of research participants.

Authorial power and control can also be unintentionally exerted by the researcher as a result of their inherent values and interests. Thus, self-awareness as a researcher is important with regards to our impact in engaging in, conducting and disseminating the research, with respect to our relationship with the participants, as well as our way of making sense of the data. Researchers need to ask themselves, for instance, if the research problematic really stems from the participants' interests and concerns, or, rather, if it reflects what one thinks should matter to the participants, or what matters to their field of research.

Hogg et al. (2000) invite marketing and consumer researchers to be more explicit about their stake in a certain situation or context, or the logical thinking behind their own interests. It is thus important for researchers to be more critical about the moral foundation of the interests they are supporting. They should also ask themselves if alternatives could be more suitable and in line with what participants perceive as interests of their own.

Our position of power, or indeed, of liability, to the field and affiliate institutions' conventions shapes our research practices to an extent that may be detrimental to the focus on the participants' interests. Hogg et al. (ibid) stress the importance of being more transparent and acknowledging the taken-for-granted impact of interests such as the presence and origin of research funding, and the embedding of a research project as part of a goal for publication, tenure or graduation. As suggested by Bettany (2007: 69), whilst a doctoral student adopting critical – including feminist – approaches often aims to *'challenge the very foundations of the thesis genre and its assumed worlds of knowledge and knowledge making[, a]t the same time there is a need to satisfy the requirements of this modernist genre, to produce a piece of research that scientifically makes an original contribution to a given field of knowledge'*.

Implications for this research

It is important for me to acknowledge the two, at times conflicting, aims/interests underlying this research. As stated before, I have a personal and political interest/commitment to promoting the dignity and legitimacy of fuller-figured individuals within our research, and, by extension, within the practice of marketing depiction. This project is also embedded in the pursuit of a funded PhD degree⁸, and scholarly publication (in marketing/management or more general social science outlets, including, hopefully, those read by fat studies scholars).

Negotiating these two aims, or 'working it out' (Bettany, 2007), is the big challenge behind this project. Despite the existing research conventions, I have the personal, political and scientific commitment to find ways to successfully achieve this research goal, which may require me to think beyond traditional research formats. However, rather than being a burden, I see these two intents as creating a productive tension that will push me to be careful about my research practices, and point to ways of improving research practices in the field.

4.4.6. Questioning research traditions

A researcher's involvement within a given research tradition bears an important influence on the resulting representation of the group at stake and requires awareness (and perhaps, the search for alternatives) in practice.

Bristor and Fischer, using a poststructuralist feminist lens, point to the fact that problematics in the field of CR have often been developed 'on the basis of masculine language and signifiers' (1993: 533) and that these have been constraining our vision of the phenomena at stake from an androcentric perspective. This reemphasises the need to develop problematics that are genuinely suitable and relevant to participants, but also commands care in the use of language and concepts in their development.

⁸ Funding for this project was received by the Fonds Québécois de Recherche en Sciences Humaines, as well as from the University of Exeter Business School. However, these sources of funding left me with a considerable amount of control and freedom over the conduct of this project.

Implications for this research

It could be argued that problematics developed around fat individuals as ‘overweight’ or ‘obese’ convey a somatophobic ideology that is a profitable driver for the marketplace. In this sense, the perpetual negative moral/medical framing of fat individuals – especially in a field that has much more to do with business than medicine – adds weight to a moral/medico-pathological agenda that, in great part, serves the interests of the weight-loss and pharmaceutical industries. Another reading could point to a sense of guilt in our consumer research scholarship associated with what is seen as a contribution to overconsumption; pushing researchers to find adaptive ways of leading consumers towards rightful consumption... A more poststructuralist feminist problematic would be based on the participants’ perspective, if not even developed by them.

Bristor and Fischer (ibid) also argue for the necessity of addressing gender concepts at the theoretical level in order to avoid propelling the assumption of the relevance or not of gender as a variable. Engaging with identity concepts such as gender (but also ethnicity, disability and fatness) is thus crucial in order to ‘delimit the domain of their applicability’ and avoid giving the impression that identities are a done fact in no further need of conceptualisation. Thus, because theories used may have an impact on the conduct of research, engagement at the conceptual level with the constructs used helps to circumscribe our interpretive lens and the domain of applicability of the research.

Implications for this research

My use of poststructuralist conceptualisation of notions such as subjectivity, body, fatness/fuller-figuredness and gender has been made clear in previous feminist research. However, it might be important for me to re-emphasise how I perceive these elements as identity constructs that are intangible and heavily mediated by socio-cultural context/language, rather than purely physical/biological realities. I do also give importance to the phenomenal/experiential aspect of the physical body; however, I also see the way we make sense of these experiences as socio-culturally mediated.

Using popular traditional theories which foster arbitrary associations between 'sex and gender' and 'phenomena not necessarily linked to sex or gender (e.g., activities like managing and shopping)' (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 528) may reify stereotypes and constrain our understanding of a phenomenon at stake, but also, importantly, limit our capacity for envisioning alternative understandings, practices and relationships (Bristor & Fischer, 1993). Here, Bristor and Fischer give the example of the relationship between marketer (assumed to be male) and consumer (assumed to be female), traditionally being conceptualised in terms of a sexually-connoted aggressor/prey power relationship. Again, this theory may masquerade as a natural/essential order, and lead the reader to believe this marketer/consumer relationship is inevitable as a result. Similarly to Danieli and Woodhams' (2005) concern, it becomes important in a feminist research context not to let the theory supersede and constrain the wealth of fresh insights that can emerge from the various voices of the participants.

Implications for this research

Consumer research has typically framed the fat individual as a 'consumer', and, more often than not, as an 'over-consumer' or 'unruly consumer'. Again, this set view of fatness presupposes a set aetiology (consumption) which is seen to be derived from a particular set of negative moral traits. This paradigm, much like that of fat individuals as 'over-' or 'unruly consumers', hinders the possibility to envision other forms of relationships or roles, such as, for instance, the fat individual as a critical consumer or as a creative producer (which is reflected, however, in Scaraboto and Fischer's article). Thus, it is important for me to steer away from these traditional conceptualisations of fuller-figuredness and see what other meanings can emerge from the participants' perspectives.

It should not even be assumed that fatness is neither relevant nor meaningful to participants at the onset of the data interpretation process. Furthermore, I do not intend on making generalised claims that could help typecast fat or fuller-figured individuals as a set (even if albeit positive) identity. I hope, however, to get a better understanding of the meanings they can give to their identities, in the light of their own contextualised discourse and my prior socio-historical understanding of the construction of the body

and fatness. Furthermore, whilst I plan on moving away from a hypothetico-deductive approach in the process of data collection to a more inductive-exploratory approach, I also intend on valuing the emerging data, whether it conforms or not to my 'fat-positive' political beliefs. For instance, though I am hoping to hear about positive meanings of fatness, I have to acknowledge, as well, the more negative associations that could emerge from the participants, for the sake of transparency and valuing their perspectives as legitimate.

4.4.7. Creativity and research as a craft

As a means to move beyond the constraints of traditional research approaches, feminist researchers value the use of creativity to the situation at hand rather than sticking to formal research processes. In this sense, feminists agree that 'thinking outside of the box' and using one's resourcefulness and social network may be necessary, not only to gain access to certain groups or investigate particular issues, but to transcend the traditional limits of research contributing in maintaining the patriarchal (or otherwise oppressive) status quo (Hogg et al., 2000, Prasad 2005). The resulting feminist research practices and accounts – which may often be considered as uncanny by more positivist researchers and critics – include several 'less scientific' elements, such as the researchers' emotions as well as artistic approaches (Prasad 2005):

Feminist accounts deliberately weave formal analytic modes with procedures that appeal to intuitive, personal, aesthetic and even revelatory modes of knowing. . . . To feminist theorists, this tone is deeply satisfying for they claim that it is necessary to bring together art and science, indeed all truth-seeking strategies, if one hopes to escape the restricted disciplinary vision which may be one instrument of domination. (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1990: 321 cited by Prasad 2005)

In this sense, not only can creative approaches enable oppressive research conventions to be surmounted, but they can bring fresh, new outlooks into phenomena, identity categories and their associated meanings; keeping the world's meanings from sedimenting according to a single patriarchal (or sizeist) vision. Finally,

this ceasing of the situation at hand also concerns the ways in which some more mundane or informal research settings, including the collection of 'off-duty information', may prove to be a valuable source of insights. The latter is, of course, only appropriate providing that it meets ethical requirements.

Implications for this research

Considering that the available imagery of fuller-figured people is limited and circumscribed by negative moral and medical discourses (especially 'before and after' diet imagery and narratives), it is apparent that, for the study of fat and fuller-figured individuals, as a researcher I need to break with past positivist traditions to give more space to the creativity and subjectivity of the participants.

The importance of creative approaches is not only relevant in the data collection setting; it also concerns the process of data transformation. Whilst 'conservatism' and 'caution' are generally valued in the process of analysis (Wolcott 1994: 23), that of interpretation is often self-knowingly more creative, imaginative and speculative, which can be paralleled with research practices '*within many feminist circles [where] creative expression and a merging of disciplinary influences are deemed integral to crafting feminist research*' (Prasad 2005: 176).

Interpretation in the feminist sense should be seen as a 'craft', at the crossing between art and technique. Even though it favours creativity and emotions, the craft of postpositivist feminist research should also reflect a concern for theoretical grounding and methodological rigour, '*even if its rigor takes different forms from that which is to be found in positivist research*' (Prasad 2005: 3). This ideal of feminist research as a form of 'disciplined creativity that results in a tangible and well-made product' (ibid) finds echoes in Thompson (1997)'s view of 'hermeneutic' interpretive consumer research, which should ideally sit at the conflation of long-honed cultural 'expertise' and creative approaches. As the author puts it:

[T]he improvisational and creative properties of textual interpretation reflect general characteristics of understanding that is accentuated as a person becomes more expert in his or her knowledge about a given domain (Neisser

1987). *Rather than reproducing the age-old distinction between art (i.e., intuitive insight) and science (i.e., methodological rigor), the hermeneutic view is that insightful marketing research emerges when methods and interpretive models are artfully used. (1997: 452)*

Implications for this research

Though I expect to look beyond the traditional research approaches and make some creative, unorthodox leaps, I intend for this project to be rigorous in its process, whereby every step is thoughtfully designed with the critical tradition and (aforementioned) principles of feminist research in mind.

4.4.8. Researcher's involvement in the field

Whilst self-identified positivist researchers generally claim to have taken all necessary measures in order to remove their own impact in the research process, this is seen by postpositivist feminist researchers as not only illusive but also as having pernicious effects on the research outcome and on participants. Researchers are blinded from the 'un-avoidable effects' of their own power position and positionality on the outcome of the research (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 530). Typically, notions such as social position (namely, research expert), gender, age, class and cultural background, race and ethnicity, may impact the relationship with the research subject (who may have differing notions or share commonalities), as well as alter one's interpretive lens.

Because awareness and transparency about one's position is so important to feminists, '[p]art of crafting feminist research is therefore to personalize it by providing many more autobiographical details and by laying bare some of the messier realities of the research account that are usually left out of conventional research accounts' (Prasad, 2005: 171). As pointed to by Bristor and Fischer (1993), explaining this interpretive context is important to orientate external observers as it may constitute a much-needed acknowledgement of the inter-subjective nature and inherent limitations of the research in question.

Implications for this research

In this research, I anticipate that several of my personal variables as a researcher will or may have an influence on my research participants. Thus, I will endeavour to be observing of my unique position in this research, both as a source of impact and experiential/phenomenological insight. I also took the decision to get involved in this research as a participant-researcher, and thus weave in a considerable amount of my own personal details to give an inkling to the reader about forgotten and unaddressed effects I may have had in the research process. Similarly, I anticipate that different intersectional variables from the participants (such as age, class, sexual orientation, culture and personal history) will affect participants' perspectives, and that emerging meanings are by no means generalisable to all fuller-figured individuals. As pointed to by Danieli and Woodhams, 'differences within the social category of "disabled" may impact on whether individuals do perceive themselves as disabled or not – either by their impairments or by society' (2005: 291). Similarly, different positions and intersectionalities among participants could influence whether they see themselves as fat, and on what basis.

Whilst traditional objectivist research advocates for the minimisation of our imprint on the field – typically by means of hierarchical distance and emotional repression (Bristor & Fischer, 1993) – feminist research tends to value our embodied, including emotional, participation in the field. Attention to subjective experience and emotions emerging from the fieldwork can be an important source of insights, as well as helping to decentralise the focus on objectivist rationality. Feminist researchers also argue for the importance of explicitly dealing with the researchers' and participants' negative emotions about the research (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Hogg et al., 2000):

Rather than ignoring the complexities of negotiating unpleasant interactions in the field, feminist epistemology involves explicit attention to these experiences, analysis of their meaning, and the incorporation of conclusions into further inquiry. (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 11)

Implications for this research

Embodied involvement becomes very important in the context of a research on fuller-figuredness, where, typically, researchers, journalists and image-makers often adopt a righteous, holier-than-thou disembodied stance when laying their claims about fat ontologies. My participation in this project is an assertive political statement, and an acknowledgement of my personal history and experience as someone in a fuller-figured embodied state. I anticipate that reflecting on my experience of fatness and my involvement in this project will provide for both a valuable source of insight and a way to address my own assumptions and influences. This role of participant-researcher should also sensitise me to the experience of participating in such a research and thus enable me to reflect critically on it. Furthermore, I anticipate that my embodied involvement in this project will provide the basis of a more mutual relationship between the main researcher and participants, and somewhat dilute the hierarchy between the two.

4.4.9. Dignity, legitimacy and human care in place of an emancipatory agenda

The improvement of women's (or members of other disenfranchised groups') conditions is often seen as a purpose behind the pursuit of feminist research (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Hogg et al., 2000). Feminist researchers typically take the form of researchers pointing to inequalities affecting the communities under study, or inviting participants to take part in community consciousness-raising, solution-finding and change-enabling activities. As we have seen, however, poststructuralists are generally more sceptical about the righteousness of universal political advance or liberation models. However, a desirable situation for poststructuralist feminists comes from the availability of a plurality of meanings and perspectives, in lieu of one set meaning with a hegemonic sway.

Similarly, Danieli and Woodhams (2005) point out that whilst a political agenda may be a driving force behind a project, one needs to be aware of the tangible dangers associated with the imposition of a preconceived political theoretical perspective at the empirical level. Writing about disability from an organisational studies perspective, these authors point out that *'The danger (...) is that political imperatives are prioritised and those views which may not support a social model may be marginalised, ignored*

(...) or dismissed as a form of “false consciousness” (Danieli & Woodhams, 2005: 287).

Danieli and Woodhams also suggest that academics, when laying out their political theories in the research setting, can be perceived as ‘experts’, which may reinforce power imbalances between the researcher/researched and skew research findings by eliciting responses that are in keeping with the model, or ‘socially desirable responses’, (2005: 288) instead of those which are reflections of the participants’ perspectives. The authors also recall how certain individuals affected by disability perceive a chasm between their perspectives and those of the disabled academics; considered as an elite group *‘dictating the terms by which research on disability should be conducted’* (Danieli & Woodhams, 2005: 287).

From this perspective, pursuing the aim of raising the consciousness of participants according to a ‘one size fits all model’ can be read as a potentially oppressive practice for it privileges the political view of the researcher over that of the participant. Furthermore, the dismissed or overlooked perspectives are not only important to a true commitment to dialogue, but may prove to be an invaluable source of insights regarding the considerations and barriers to real-life improvements for a variety of individuals.

Thus, Danieli and Woodhams (2005) enjoin scholars to distinguish between their own political agenda, which may ignite the necessity for alternative research approaches, and the contentious imposition of a political theoretical perspective on the participants in a research setting. Similarly, using a political model as a basis to criticise the participants’ discourse and highlight their ‘false consciousness’ may also be seen as an oppressive feminist practice when a true commitment to participants’ dignity and legitimacy is held.

Implications for this research

This research stems from a political model of fatness as adopted by non-essentialist fat studies scholars. I see fatness as an identity construct mainly suffering the consequences of a negative moral and medical framing. I consider fatness as an identity of which meaning can be mediated by language, and which is currently shaped (in marketplace imagery and research) without the voice of those in that embodied state.

In this sense, my research agenda is admittedly political and aims for change in both marketplace representation and in research representation. However, there is an important nuance to be made with traditional emancipatory research.

Whilst emancipatory interests for the participants are often driving forces behind feminist research projects (see Ozanne, Moscato, & Kunkel, 2013), one needs to question the appropriateness of carrying these interests within a given empirical fieldwork setting. This ambiguity becomes particularly relevant, if not exemplary, in the case of fatness, where researchers in various fields including CR, have endeavoured to conduct research to 'save' participants from the 'obesity epidemic'. This has generally (always, to my knowledge) been done without questioning if this interest reflects the way participants feel about this issue, or, indeed, if they feel oppressed by this agenda. Certainly, from my personal perspective as a fat individual (which, of course, is not necessarily reflective of all fat or fuller-figured perspectives) I see this traditional agenda as hindering my dignity and legitimacy as an individual.

Attention to ethics and welfare of the participants is of utmost importance to feminist researchers. As such, it is essential to pay attention to the potential risks, physical and psychological, involved in the participation in the research. Particular scrutiny needs to be applied to the fieldwork and dissemination of research. Researchers need to be proactive in finding ways to safeguard participants' security and dignity.

Implications for this research

A core issue with respect to ethics is the degree of anonymity/visibility deemed acceptable in a context where I would like to share ownership of the project with the participants.

Another important aspect of this research for me is a concern for the experience of the participants during the research process. Whilst this is not pursued as an emancipatory goal, per se, I strive for positive effects for participants that could arise from them feeling cared for (as human beings with a voice and dignity) and validated within this research.

A main area of concern in this research is the notion of wording to use to refer to the participants so that it avoids emotional harm (fat, though seen as a politically neutral and appropriate word by many activists and scholars to refer to people that are beyond the 'norm', may be perceived as a form of 'symbolic violence' by some of the participants) and address the phenomenon at stake in this research.

4.5. Conclusion

This research builds on the feminist poststructuralist premise that valuing different voices can help dislodge the objectifying discourse on fuller-figuredness pervasive in marketplace and research representation. In spite of my decision to address the perspectives of fuller-figured individuals, there are many potential political risks that should be taken into consideration, in order to ensure the dignity and legitimacy of the participants. For instance, research framing and design, even if critically intentioned, can be particularly effective in contributing to misrepresentation (Bristor & Fischer, 1993) and epistemic closure. As asserted by 'deaf studies' scholars Stone and West:

[T]here are multiple, complex and shifting ways of representing the voices of others. At some stage, authorial decisions are made. It is how those decisions are reached that makes the difference between an inappropriate, perhaps damaging representation of voice, and one which is reflexive, respectful and validated.' (2012: 649)

Thus, here is a summary of the considerations taken into account to foster the dignity and legitimacy of the voice of the participants in this research:

Getting the participants involved in the dialogue of research first implies ensuring the project is aligned with their interests (as opposed to those of the market, those of the researcher, or those wrongly assumed to be those of the participants by the researcher). It also entails transferring a share of our role as expert to the participants, ideally in various stages of the research process; from problematic setting, to research designs, data collection, data transformation and dissemination of results.

The use of reflexivity is a core pillar of feminist research, and is also crucial in ensuring that the voice of the participant is conveyed. Reflexivity can be used as a means to acknowledge and address the impact of our position as a researcher (our retaining of authorial control and affecting personal variables) and the implications associated with our decisions along the research design and process. Creativity and resourcefulness may address some of the challenges identified in the process. Creative thinking can be useful from the instigation of a research project, to the adoption of an inventive data collection method (allowing for deviations from the initial protocol, and ceasing opportunities, too), and the selection of a data transformation approach that is more speculative and imaginative in nature than rigorous and tied to conventional understandings. In this sense, opting for a combination of description and interpretation can be an interesting avenue to consider.

Feminist researchers often value the personal, embodied involvement of the researcher in the research project. For instance, autoethnographic/reflexive accounts as a fuller-figured woman can provide for important experiential knowledge, whereas '[s]eparating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks' (Maxwell, 2013: 38). However, as reminded by Bristor and Fischer (1993), it is important to remember that being does not mean knowing, and that one should not presuppose similar meanings or subjectivities in others that may be affected by different life variables and circumstances. Accounting for our perspectives as researchers, however, enables

more transparency about our position and potential bias. Participation in the research also enables ourselves to be sensitised, to a certain extent, to the experience of the participants in the research context, and favours the establishment of more balanced relationships, based on mutual sharing of information.

Feminist research is often associated with the aim of instituting beneficial changes to the life of women. However, as we have seen, pursuing the goal of 'emancipation' within research can be seen as futile (from a poststructuralist perspective), or worse, associated with adverse consequences. Thus, it is essential to question the adequacy of imposing a set political agenda that risks muting the participants at the empirical level. Within this research, my political intent is not to impose my views on the participants, but, rather, to see how the fact of involving their voices and bodies can challenge our existing theories.

Whilst I do not actively seek the emancipation of participants, I do hope that my research approach will be perceived as a positive experience by them (one that fosters their dignity and legitimacy). I thus intend on putting as much human care as possible into the design, conduct and dissemination of this research, and pay special attention to ethical considerations. Finally, getting the participants involved in the dialogue of research also implies dissemination in media that are relevant and accessible to them, which is one of my intent with this research, along with sharing the ownership of this project, should they wish to accept it.

5. Methodological approach

This research used a feminist approach as a means to find out the ways different fuller-figured individuals want to be presented in visual culture, and, by extension, in research. The goal was to document an extended breadth of meanings associated with fuller-figured individuals, coming from people, who were, like me, fuller-figured themselves. Thus, one of the main particularities of this research was an emphasis on the envisioned presentation of the participants, as opposed to those pre-existing in the marketplace.

This research methodology was instigated with an adapted 'photovoice' approach: a participative photographic method which shares similarities with the Mirrors⁹ project, which served as an inspiration for this project. The idea in this current research project was for the participants (me included) to create portraits reflecting how they would want to be depicted, if they had the power to do so. Additionally, participants' presentations, ideas and impressions on current representations, as well as appreciation on their resulting portraits, were documented to achieve a contextualised understanding of the meanings different fuller-figured women can give to their selves/bodies. Purposive descriptions and a hermeneutic/reflective interpretative approach were used to present and make sense of the resulting data.

Overall, instead of being the outcome of a fixed, predefined research protocol, it is fairer to say that the research was the outcome of a succession of reflective questioning, re-questioning and decisions. Thus, the emergent design arose in light of my involvement with the participants and as a participant in this research. In this chapter, instead of sticking to a 'clean' description of my research design, I made the conscious decision to be more transparent: I retell the 'messy' evolution of this research process. To borrow Bettany's words (2007), this chapter is about 'how I worked it out' with feminist poststructuralist research principles in mind.

As stated earlier in the epistemological framework, this research initially overtly entertained emancipatory and celebratory interests, which were concomitant to the

⁹ A description of the Mirrors project is given in the 'Foreword' of this thesis.

development of a photovoice research approach¹⁰. My political intent was to contribute to offsetting the negative associations pervasively made with fuller-figuredness in the marketplace imagery and society by supplementing existing accounts with those coming from the perspectives of larger individuals themselves. As this research progressed, however, it became clear that fuller-figured individuals had something different to offer in addition to alternative accounts. Their perspectives enabled blind spots in our traditional research practices to be highlighted and addressed. They also pointed to the relevance of alternative, more subjective accounts that valued not only the voice/embodied experience of various individuals.

5.1 Research conceptualisation

As a way to suggest new modes of inquiry and depiction of fuller-figured individuals, and as a means to cater to certain challenges expressed in the previous chapters, I used and adapted a research approach called 'photovoice' (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice is a participative action research method developed to involve members of disenfranchised groups in the process of personal and social changes (from community and skill building, social awareness, advocacy, solution-finding and change implementation). The method encourages research subjects to create and discuss photographs of their own realities, focusing on assets, needs and aspirations; thus accounting for the subjective perspectives of participants and enabling the needs of members of the population at stake to be assessed. Photovoice generally focuses on groups whose perspectives and voices have been marginalised or erased, and who are not necessarily in positions of power to speak up or be heard. Photovoice, as a research approach, is generally anchored in goal of social changes, and seeks to both mobilise and empower individuals and communities around certain issues affecting them. It is also used as a tool of sensibilisation geared towards policy makers.

Photovoice was developed around the core feminist principle of 'valuing the voice of participants'. The instigators of the approach claim that their method affords the 'possibility' (though I rather see it as an attempt) 'of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world' (Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996: 1393). This

¹⁰ Appendix 1 provides the description of the project given to the participants at that stage.

approach allegedly provides participants 'with the power to decide for themselves what kind of information and representation is most appropriate to capture the social, political, ethical and psychological challenges they face' (Bleiker & Kay, 2011: 417).

Photovoice was also developed with democratic principles in mind, and with the assumption that 'people are experts on their own lives' (Wang et al., 2004: 911) and that they have 'a wealth of valuable experiences' (Ozanne & Anderson, 2012: 288). As discussed in the epistemological framework, acknowledging the expertise of the participants was an important feminist consideration for this research. To harness this expertise, photovoice research projects typically involve participants in the creation of images – thus 'democratis[ing] image-making dynamic' (Clover, 2006: 275) – as well as in their interpretations. In principle, photovoice research projects should involve participants in the elaboration of research problematics, to ensure their adequacy and relevance (Ozanne et al., 2013). This being said, participants' implications can vary greatly among projects, where the participants can be seen as mere data sources, or integral project owners and leaders. Moreover, photovoice was conceptualised according to the feminist research principle of action orientation: contributing to raising the critical consciousness of participants, mobilising them, and engaging them in actions for social awareness and changes (Wang et al., 1996).

Consumer researcher Julie Ozanne, a leading proponent of the transformative consumer research movement, encourages the use of photovoice in CR, not only as a means to investigate issues of collective and individual welfare from the perspective of the people involved, but, also, as a way to empower participant consumers in the process of research (see for instance Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; Ozanne & Anderson, 2012; Ozanne et al., 2013). Ozanne and her co-authors, building on the work of Wang, Burris et al. 1996, argue for photovoice as an important tool for consumer researchers and marketing managers alike.

Given its focus on identifying unmet needs and also documenting community resources, it could be particularly relevant to marketing managers (...) [and] is another valuable tool for corporate social responsibility and for firms working within their communities to help solve social problems. (Ozanne & Anderson,

2012: 287–288)

Photovoice is discussed as a culturally sensitive approach, enabling the investigation of consumers' experiences, realities and aspirations, which can otherwise be flattened by more traditional approaches or in contexts that are more distant and foreign to the researchers/managers. Furthermore, photovoice is seen as a forward-looking approach made the more interesting '*[a]s the trend towards consumers' co-creation and collaboration in the marketplace grows.* (2012: 288)

Whereas Ozanne and her co-authors convincingly portray photovoice as an opportunity for researchers and managers to gain deep insights and align their practices with the needs of collectivities, very few empirical research studies have followed suit with this approach in CR (and none, to my knowledge, have been conducted in fat studies scholarship). This lack of popularity in CR, specifically, may be due to the intensive nature of photovoice, which '*takes time and requires several points of contacts with consumers*' and may be inappropriate in certain contexts where time is a precarious resource and where discussing private matters in community groups may be perceived as altering one's face, or dignity (Ozanne & Anderson, 2012: 288).

Whilst Ozanne's view of photovoice is first and foremost one of a participant action research approach that should be geared towards the welfare and empowerment of communities, other consumer researchers have also used the photovoice concept without pursuing an emancipatory agenda. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) used a photovoice approach as part of their research method in order to study the lifeworlds of adolescents in two geographic communities (including the interweaving of discourses of consumption within identity). The authors first invited the participants to note down their consumption habits, dreams and life aspirations in a diary. A subset of participants were then tasked to photo-document 'a week in their lives': an account of who they were, and meaningful aspects of their everyday existence. Finally, these informants took part in an in-depth interview where they were prompted to discuss their own photos (a concept referred to by the authors as 'autodrive'), as well as the content of their diaries. This combination of methods enabled the authors to emphasise how participants' understanding of their self, their

locality as part of the wider global landscape and their understanding of 'global youth culture' is influenced in a dialectic relationship between global and local forces/discourses. The data gathered through this combination of methods, including photovoice, enabled important local nuances to be captured in relation to those structures, which brought the authors to endorse a more 'glocal' vision of youth culture, in contrast with the popular idea of it being first and foremost a 'global' phenomenon.

In the context of this research, I see photovoice as a *'technique that offers consumers new ways to collectively and powerfully represent their needs through potent visual images'* (Ozanne & Anderson, 2010: 288). However, whilst photovoice's founding principles include empowerment and consciousness-rising goals, I took a few steps away from the emancipatory ambitions set at the beginning of this project. This change arose as I started to realise that the aim of this research should not only be about the 'liberation of the participants' (in the direct context of this research), as this would suggest participants' positions as inherently disempowered or reliant on me as a researcher. The participants selected – and perhaps given an important selection bias – were, in spite of the bad press on 'overweightness', quite well in their skins. I could also increasingly see the pitfalls of emphasising my political/celebratory vision of body diversity (which I still hold, nonetheless) too much with the participants. Thus, the focus became more about documenting the meanings – often positive (probably due to an important influence on my part as a researcher), sometimes negative, and sometimes more ambiguous or conflicting – which all contribute to complexify the understandings of fat and fuller-figured individuals, and challenge some of our existing theoretical understanding of how consumers envision their self and body.

Letting go of some of my immediate emancipatory ambitions also made me realise that before, or instead of, attempting any heroic act, my immediate focus should be on what could otherwise be seen as an elementary responsibility, as a researcher, in acknowledging research subjects as worthy of dignity and legitimate in their views. Concomitantly, whilst photovoice typically focuses on photography skill building in order to empower participants and sharpen their expression skills (Wang et al., 1996; Ozanne et al., 2013), this was not a focus of this research.

Because the focus was on the meanings given to the body/self-image,

experience and understanding the idea of adopting self-portraits (in a similar way to the Mirrors project) became particularly interesting. Furthermore, instead of focusing solely on narrative accounts, self-portraits became a privileged opportunity to involve not just the voice, but the embodied perspectives, including the body image of participants in this research.

5.1.1. Why self-portraiture?

Art philosopher Freeland, similarly to the instigators of the 'Mirrors' project, contends that portraits, especially the self-directed ones, are powerful tools to get to know individuals. She defines a portraiture as *'a representation or depiction of a living being as a unique individual possessing (1) a recognizable physical body along with (2) an inner life, i.e. some sort of character and/or psychological or mental states'* (Freeland, 2010: 5).

Firstly, the notion of recognisable physical body refers to the resemblances between the depiction and the bodily appearance of its subject. Secondly, the notion of inner life points to aspects such as *'the existence and nature of consciousness' – which involves a being, generally aware and alive – as well as the 'outward expression of inner states'* of the person depicted (Freeland, 2010: 12). As Freeland points out with regards to that latter aspect, a portrait should ideally succeed in transmitting the sitter's 'distinctive expression' or 'air'; to use Barthes' way of referring to someone's 'unique essence or inner character'. The notion of 'air' can be translated into the expression of one's unique subjectivity, regardless if that subjectivity is viewed as a matter of essential core, or as a social construction. Freeland suggests that someone's distinctive 'air' makes the individual recognisable to a certain extent, despite changes in the body such as age and weight fluctuation.

According to Freeland, the ability to recognise and distinguish features and facial expressions of other humans is an important characteristic of our species. She adds:

As humans, we are well attuned to the vivacity and variety of other humans' emotional expressions, and we are also experienced in discerning aspects of

interior life shown in a person's outward behaviour, most especially in that favorite subject of portrait artists, the face. (Freeland, 2010: 154)

Considering the portrait's special ability at conveying a person's character and inner state, it is likely that these may act as important reminders of the humanity of the participants within the research presentation. But aside from this, participants' portraits can be seen as rich and highly self-conscious data sources.

According to Freeland, to qualify as portraits, depictions need to involve the awareness of the process by the artist and sitter; requiring notably that *'the subject consciously presents a self to be conveyed in the resulting artwork'* (2010: 17). Freeland also points out that people have an intent, or anticipated outcome, when having their portraits made.

Aside from deportment and facial expression, decisions pertaining to the use of settings, costumes, props and makeup can act as 'symbolic attributes' (Rippin, 2012) for the participants, which may enable them to convey a rich variety of meanings about their selves. It is equally important to consider that the genre of portraiture evolve concomitantly with prevailing understandings of the self (Freeland, 2010; Rippin, 2012). For instance, Freeland retells how, from the 16th century onward, props used to convey social status (seen as an important identity determinant) and identity of the sitter started to be replaced by a focus on expression, which increasingly emphasised the internal life of the person. Freeland further suggests that:

[C]ontemporary views about the person, virtue, personality traits, and so on, would surely have an effect on how people who commissioned portraits thought about what was needed in order to pose and create a successful presentation of themselves to others. (Freeland, 2010:83)

As such, the elements involved in the creation of their self-directed portraits are likely to be telling of the ways the sitters conceptualise their selves and relate to social and marketplace visual conventions.

However fanciful or staged the construction of a portraiture may seem, 'self-

presentation is not a dishonest activity, since your public image purports to be exactly what it is: the socially visible face of a being who is presenting it as a target for social interaction' (2010: 103).

Freeland's definition and elicitation of the particular characteristics of portraits suggest that the latter act as constructions which involve a special awareness and intent by the sitter, mediated by social conventions. I contend that this makes portraiture not just a privileged platform for self and body expression for the participants, but as such an advantageous data collection tool with which to investigate people's self-understanding and desired presentation in the inevitable context of social interplay.

5.1.2. Photovoice and its creative adaptation

Ozanne et al. (2013) recall how participants, in the context of a photovoice study which did not provide them with technical training, '*were disappointed to discover that many photos were spoiled*' and that '*[t]he ownership of botched photos had the effect of reinforcing participants' perceived lack of agency, an unfortunate outcome that training could have prevented*' (2013: 50). In order to maximise the chances of participants having ownership of satisfactory depictions and ensure focus on what is at stake – participants' self-presentation, or self-portraits –, I opted instead to work with a photographer who would facilitate the creation of portraitures directed by the participants.

The collaboration with a photographer is rather unusual in the context of a photovoice approach, and I have received criticism to that effect from the workshop conductor whilst attending photovoice training (PhotoVoice, 2011) in 2011. Nonetheless, I see a collaboration with a photographer as a twist that grants access to a tool and expertise that are generally used against or without the portrayal of fuller-figured individuals (advertising or editorial photo).

Both traditional portraits (made by someone else but the sitter) and self-portraits offer interesting perspectives for research. Whilst self-portraits give '*more freedom to capture both what [the subjects] see and what they want to project about an inner self*'

(Freeland, 2010: 156), traditional portraits involve *'complex negotiations of identity between the artist and sitter when the two are distinct'* (Freeland, 2010: 155). In the latter case, *'the resulting image can manifest their differing desires and attitudes about it'* (Freeland, 2010: 17). I found that a self-directed portrait, as opposed to a self-portrait or a traditional portrait, could be a promising hybrid for it afforded the participants the freedom to express their vision, and required them to explicitly verbalise their intent for their self-presentation to me, as the middle-women between the participant and the photographer. This aspect of self-direction would normally be obscured when focusing solely on self-portraits, or pre-existing photos.

Admittedly, I also found that working with a portraiture photographer made this project more exciting and playful for the participants, including me. Whilst this can be interpreted as a form of 'narcissistic' self-indulgence on my behalf (and perhaps, rightfully so!), it can also be seen as a political statement; a positive assertion of fuller-figuredness as an embodied state that deserves just as much pride as other more currently idealised silhouettes. I see this as a much-needed disruption of the traditional outlook on fatness within research where feelings of guilt and self-loathing are presupposed and a reaction of self-abasement is almost expected (see King & Shapiro, 2006; Wann, 2009).

Overall, the playful and creative elements of the process were expected to offset some of the potential negative feelings about being targeted/getting involved in a research study about fuller-figuredness. In this case, it became a matter of caring for the experience of the participants in the research context (another feminist principle); ensuring that they felt dignified, and acknowledged as legitimate subjects. Thus, this also became an opportunity for mutuality, as I was hoping the participants would enjoy the experience and get a set of photos out of this project.

Though the goal was to leave maximum control over creative direction to the participants (by offering the option of a remote shutter, for instance), it is necessary to acknowledge the strong influence the photographer and I (as a researcher) had on the resulting photos. Our prime role on the set was to facilitate and record the expression of the vision of the participants with the most satisfactory outcome for them (budget permitting, of course). Retrospectively, the photographer and I were very supportive

and validating of participants' ideas. In this respect, we were not neutral in the objectivist research sense. In fact, it seemed to me that it would have been inappropriate to be a detached, neutral observer in the instance of the photo session, especially because the participant gave so much of themselves, in a position that made them potentially insecure. This is also consistent with feminist research principles where human care for the participant is seen as acceptable, despite its impact on the research outcome. Nevertheless, the photographer (Alice) and I made a point to be honest in our remarks rather than make use of exaggerated or deceitful praises.

Giving time to the participants to conceptualise their self-presentation, and the opportunity to stage the latter as much or as little as they wanted, with symbolic set, props or poses, was another decision taken to ensure participants could craft a representative/satisfactory concept.

One more decision taken in the context of this research, which was more unorthodox for a photovoice or CR project, is that of leaving the option to participants to reveal or conceal their identity. Though conventional wisdom advocates anonymity of research participants, in this research context I saw this option as a question of authorship/ownership of perspective, but also an opportunity to counteract the dehumanising practice of anonymising larger individuals as objects of research. Giving the option to the participants to show their faces and reveal their first names if they wished, carried important ethical risks (which needed to be made explicit at the onset of the project). However, it also had the important potential to counteract the common idea that fuller-figuredness is something to be ashamed of. Whilst I made the risks of recognition clear to the participants, they all opted, without showing signs of hesitation, to keep recognisable facial features and use their own first names. Conversely, part of my intention when conducting this research was to get them involved in and approve the final research account. (Most participants took part in the editing and approval of their profiles. However, mutual time constraints and the academic format of the thesis appeared to have got the better of those who expressed their interests in reading the whole output.)

Consequently, this visibility of the participants makes the notion of participants'

dignity my utmost priority. Presenting participants with dignity should, at all times within this research, take precedence over the divulging of data/ insight that could otherwise have some degrading/objectifying effects on them. Striking a balance between giving as much legitimacy to the voice and different participants' perspectives as possible whilst using my personal judgement to identify accounts or details that could carry the potential of having negative effects on them was a politically tricky endeavour. It was perhaps one of the core challenges I faced with this thesis.

Aside from notions of recognition, I have taken a number of steps to ensure ethical-soundness of the research. I have developed a thorough ethical protocol and data management plan (see Appendix 1) which have been approved by the Business School ethical officer. Participants were informed of the risks I could envision being associated with this project, and explicit consent was requested from the onset. This included an authorisation for me to use the research data for analysis purposes and potential publication. A hard copy of the form was signed by each participant. Participants were also presented with a form about copyright, involving different options with regards to diffusion within and beyond the scope of the research. Ownership of the photos was shared between the participant, me as a researcher and the photographer (including allowed use for her portfolio).

5.2. Recruitment

My idea with this project was to develop an in-depth dialogue with a limited amount of participants, conforming to the idea of close contextuality favoured by many feminist researchers (Hogg et al., 2000). This would enable me to dedicate more time and budget to each participant, in order to create the best caring experience for them, develop a more in-depth research relationship and spend more time understanding their individual accounts.

Participant recruitment took place between November 2011 and May 2012. Due to the various political/moral dimensions surrounding the research topic, establishing recruitment criteria was complex. Overall, I retained the following selection criteria:

The participants needed to be:

1. female;
 2. self-identifying as 'bigger', 'larger' or 'fuller' in terms of their overall figure;
 3. considered by the researcher as 'bigger', 'larger' or 'fuller';
 4. women who appear 'well in their skin' to a certain extent; and
 5. women who are not fat activists or fat studies scholars.
-
1. Female: whilst I frequently hesitated about gendering this research, I did opt for working with women for certain reasons. First, although this is increasingly becoming a concern for men too, it is a well-known fact that women are socialised much more so than men to monitor their weight, size and appearance. But ultimately, given the relatively intimate nature of this research, I personally felt more comfortable, as a female researcher, collaborating with female participants. However, I consider that men could have been included in this study and would have offered great benefit to this project. Due to the exclusively female sample, the choice of a female photographer (though quite 'slender') was presumed to be more adequate in order to make sure the participants would be comfortable.
 2. Self-identifying as 'bigger', 'larger' or 'fuller' in terms of overall figure: my goal in this research was to keep the idea of fuller-figuredness under exploration and 'open' as opposed to 'fixed' by certain criteria. I was especially keen to avoid fixing the idea of fuller-figuredness by reference to those criteria commonly used as a basis for problematisation, such as (BMI, body weight or marketplace standard clothes sizes). With this in mind, I took the view that one of the most legitimate ways of qualifying participants would be through their subjective view of themselves, and the extent to which they identify themselves as being 'bigger', 'larger', 'heavier' or otherwise 'fuller' in terms of their figure, as opposed to just assuming objectively that they would identify themselves as such.
 3. Considered by the researcher as 'bigger', 'larger' or 'fuller' in terms of overall figure: whilst I was not specifically seeking out participants of a very big body stature, I often faced the situation where individuals – whom I would consider

as very slender and of a size and physique which is already represented positively in the marketplace (or which is not explicitly targeted by the medical and marketplace problematisation of weight) – would eagerly propose their participation in the research as I was discussing it. Whilst the fact that these people associated themselves as being bigger or ‘fat’ might be telling about the fluidity of the concept of fatness, and the pervasive social pressure to be slender¹¹, for me to rely solely on the criteria of the participants’ subjective view of themselves as bigger would have detracted from my goal of addressing the often forgotten perspectives of those who are explicitly targeted, even to a slight degree, by the medical and marketplace problematisation of weight. Here, I am referring to those groups that are often objectified by medical/marketing research standards, stereotyped or erased by mainstream marketplace imagery, or segregated by marketplace sizing conventions because of their bigger sizes. Whilst I did not wish to give precedence to the commonly used denominators of fatness, such as the BMI, body weight or clothes size – and thus did not ask these questions of the participants – I still had to rely on the idea that the selected participants would be bigger than what is expected of them by the normative standards.

4. Appearing ‘well in their skin’: an important criterion to me was to work with participants that seemed to be relatively comfortable with their bodies and able to comfortably engage in discussions about their size and appearance. This criterion was also an important selection bias that would have an impact on the types of depictions presented in this thesis. This will be discussed in more detail, further. I applied the ‘well in their skin’ criterion (as for establishing fuller-figuredness in participants referred to above) with my own subjective judgement, in order to minimise the distress that could occur in such a research context. Although these could by no means be seen as fool-proof, I used the following qualification strategies:
 - a. I favoured participants that would volunteer to participate and seemed genuinely interested in the research when I discussed the project with them;

¹¹ I also, in some cases, wondered whether these people wanted some reassurance that they were not ‘fat’.

- b. when individuals offered to introduce me to friends as potential candidates, I emphasised the importance of that person being comfortable with their bodies;
 - c. when directly recruiting participants, I targeted those who I knew were at relative ease with the topic (often because we had discussed it together beforehand), or, when dealing with strangers, I opted for those who appeared to be assertive in terms of their style and personality;
 - d. before engaging in the research, participants were walked through the potential risks for them (at least those risks that I could anticipate) in order to raise their awareness and to ensure a certain level of personal confidence in the participant;
 - e. finally, as an ongoing measure, if at any point during the research the participant seemed uncomfortable or distressed, measures would be taken to ensure their emotional safety.
5. Not fat activists (or fat studies scholars): this criterion was used because most of the existing research revolves around the perspectives of fat activists whose (political) perspectives are currently being documented by several fat studies scholars. With this research, I was particularly interested in the perspectives of lay fuller-figured women, who were not yet schooled into the activist mindset, but may, nonetheless, have had strong opinions about the way they would like to be portrayed.

Table 1 – Recruited participants

Participant	Relationship to me	Mode of recruitment
Sara-Jane ('SJ')(UK)	Acquaintance/friend for few months at time of recruitment	She volunteered her participation
Michaela (UK)	Acquaintance/friend for few months at time of recruitment	She volunteered her participation
Sarah (UK)	Acquaintance/friend for a year at time of recruitment	I asked her directly for her participation
Laura (UK)	Stranger	She was recruited by SJ
Louise (UK)	Stranger	I asked her directly for her participation
Elizabeth (UK)	Stranger	She was recruited by Alice (photographer)

Linda (Canada)	Acquaintance who expressed interests in my topic of research a few years ago	I asked her for her participation via a mutual connection
José (Canada)	Member of my extended family	I asked her directly for her participation

In addition to my participation in the study, eight participants were recruited and four more were formally approached, but, for various reasons, did not proceed with the project. One person volunteered herself but we never had a chance to coordinate the photo session, partly due to timing and the location in London. One of my Quebec contacts could not participate in the project, claiming lack of time. I interviewed a potential participant who was referred to me by one of her friends, but I did not get the sense that she identified herself as a fuller-figured or larger person and, to me, she was quite average sized if not, even, small. Finally, another women in Exeter initially accepted to participate but never replied to my attempts at contacting her.

5.2.1. Sample particularity

Although the participants could be technically considered as ‘plus-size’, I would not say that they were, generally speaking, very large at all. This is in great part due to some limitations in terms of recruitment pool. If the group composition had its flaws, partly because it did not allow me to account for the perspectives of very large people, the sample, however, provided for an interesting vantage point.

On one hand, fat studies scholars generally seem more interested in much larger individuals. This can be seen as a legitimate interest, as it can be assumed that much larger people are often affected to a greater extent by the effects of fat-phobia and weight-based discrimination. On the other hand, it could be argued that individuals at odds with, yet still close to, the size norm could be in a tricky, in-between identity situation. For instance, it can be assumed that participants’ proximity to the norm, or to that culturally enshrined thin ‘essential self’, renders them especially receptive to apparently easy weight-loss solutions. Because it may appear much easier for them to successfully undertake weight loss for the purpose of ‘fitting in’, it could be hypothesised that they are also less likely to tolerate their current body and self ‘as is’. As such, I find the composition of the participants’ sample in terms of sizes particularly

interesting as this tension between normality and 'fuller-figuredness' is likely to have an effect on the perception of their identity and bodies. However, future extensions of this research project should include a greater range of sizes and ethnical backgrounds.

5.2.2. Reflexive note about the recruitment process

The process of recruiting participants was a particularly delicate and challenging one. For this reason, I was concerned about being over confident in insinuating that people would be larger than average, and thinking that this could be accepted, and even embraced by potential participants. This concern stemmed from the fact that I have had a few years of immersion into political fat studies scholarship, and interaction with size acceptance campaigners, 'fatshionistas' and size assertive burlesque performers. In this sense, I was aware that I have almost been 'reconditioned' into thinking that body diversity should be fought for and celebrated. Similarly, this implied that I needed to remain aware of this 'reconditioning' as my own particularity/bias when engaging with and making sense of participants' accounts, including interpreting my own account as a participant-researcher.

This being said, I felt extremely wary of offending people, and, when I finally dared to speak about the topic of my research, I soon realised that using the word fat was not an option in recruitment, and I struggled to find the appropriate words to use. I spoke freely about my research but would rarely feel confident enough to ask people directly to participate. Potentially because people sensed that I was earnest about the project, and, I hope, because they found it quite positive and stimulating (especially with the prospect of a professional photo shoot), several participants immediately volunteered to take part.

I talked about my research project to just about anybody in my vicinity, and several people offered their participation or told me about their intention to mention the project to good friends who would potentially be interested. Several participants also suggested they would like to involve some of their friends or acquaintances. I owe a lot to these people who carried out much of the delicate work of introducing this project for me. Whilst I feel disappointed to an extent by my inability to ask directly for participation in this research context – especially given my years of experience in

recruiting participants for consumer research projects in the commercial or academic realm – I think this indirect approach, including snowball sampling among close friends, made for a much smoother and less hurtful process than that which would have been achieved by having a near stranger qualifying an unsuspecting individual for a study on ‘fatness’.

As I began to notice that people were enthusiastic about the project, I became more confident about asking a few people directly to participate; often because they were close enough to me (I opened the project to Quebec, where I am from), or because I interpreted their outgoing personality or flamboyant style as some form of assertiveness about their body. I assumed that targeting apparently assertive individuals would decrease the risk of insulting or hurting them.

One outgoing Exeterian in her early thirties accepted when I approached her directly to participate in the research, but only after a half-joking reaction: ‘so you mean I am fat?!’. This was obviously an uncomfortable thing for me to answer honestly. Not because she was very big – after all, none of the participants or individuals I approached were, to me, very big. This discomfort stemmed from the fact that, whilst I decided to use the word ‘fuller’ instead of fat to avoid causing offence, the word ‘fuller,’ in a very broad and neutral sense, might be unconventional to people without a fat studies or activism background. I replied something along the lines of: ‘I am studying how fuller-figured women want to be represented in a body diversity perspective. I myself, will be participating too’. I think, in this case, as well as in respect of the other recruits, including myself in the participant sample helped comfort people into understanding that I was not objectifying them from a ‘disembodied researcher’ perspective (Levy-Navarro, 2008), nor that I was exclusively interested in extreme degrees of body weight (I am in the ‘light’ spectrum of fuller-figuredness’). In the end, the lady appeared quite enthusiastic about participating and giving me her contact details. Unfortunately, I did not hear back from her after making contacting, and I am not sure, to this day, if it was due to her changing her mind, giving me the wrong contact details or me just misreading her contact information. This was obviously a disappointment for me, not because of losing a potential participant but because of the lingering feeling of guilt associated with the idea of having potentially hurt or offended someone. I did write a second email to apologise, in case I had offended her.

I was very happy to see how certain people embraced the project as an exciting opportunity. I expect that the context of a professional photo session did help – most participants seemed to approach the project in a playful, enthusiastic manner.

Here are the consent comments I received from the participants:

‘Hi Annie, I am really excited about this project and would love to be involved if it’s possible. Please tell me more!’ (Laura)

‘I am happy to participate in this study.’ (Louise)

‘Hi Annie, I agree with the project description and am happy to help.’ (Sarah)

‘I’d love to take part :)’ (Michaela)

‘I think it sounds really interesting and I am well up for it. I have never done a blog before so I hope I am doing it correctly.’ (SJ)

‘All good... Next’ (José)

‘Yeah I’ll give it a go!’ (Elizabeth)

5.3. Data collection

The data collection was designed in several steps which took place over a period of approximately one and a half months per participant (ranging from March to July 2012 for all participants). An important focus was put on creating a fun, caring experience for the participants. I also emphasised the positive tone of the research in my description to participants, which is likely to have influenced their accounts. A description of the research project as provided to the participants at the onset of the project can be found in Appendix 1. This description sets out the key aims and steps, as well as some of the potential risks associated with participation.

Table 2 – Summary of Data Set

nine involved participants including me (researcher)
six blogs (including mine) + emails
six pre-photo interviews (audio recorded and written up)
nine photo sessions (audio recorded and/or written up)
3599 photos created and kept
eight photo review sessions + one by email (audio recorded and written up)
one focus group (audio recorded, written up + participants' comments sheets)

5.3.1. Preparatory blogs and conversations

The main purpose of this first preparation step was to give an opportunity for participants to present themselves and to develop ideas for their photo session. This step was also an opportunity to document their feelings about current representations of women in visual culture and society and their impressions of the clothing available for fuller-figured women. Though these aspects were not the object of an explicit focus in the research interpretation, I found them important to contextualise and contrast their self-presentation (see Appendix 2 for guide research questions).

During this first step, participants were invited to write a pre-set, semi-private online journal (blog on Blogger.com), which could only be accessed by the participant and me. I initially thought that blogs would be a user-friendly alternative that could enable the participants to freely communicate their reflections with the use of photos, videos or other hyperlinks of relevance. They could also use text emphasis to draw my attention to meaningful elements. Conforming to my epistemological standpoint, I also felt that giving the participants the time and space to reflect on their self-presentation and identity was a much more dignifying way to engage them in this project instead of putting them on the spot in face-to-face interviews right away.

The blog was a first-time experience for all participants, except for me. Some embraced it (and even expressed their intent to keep on blogging afterwards), whilst others did not as much. In order to accommodate the preferences and situations of various participants, blogs were sometimes replaced or supplemented by one or more face-to-face conversations (participants were informed of the main questions

beforehand). Emails were also used as a complement (though the format was very similar to the blogs). The blog and conversations were, for the participants, an opportunity to reflect on and voice their concerns and aspirations with regards to their depiction (or more generally, that of fuller-figured individuals). It was often necessary for me to 'prompt' them to further develop their ideas. The fact of me further prompting the participants seems to have been perceived as challenging at times:

Laura: It's great because obviously I have been open and honest and said what pops into my mind at the time... and then you come back with some questions which I try to evaluate and it is really challenging and even some of the honesty which I thought I was quite confident about... speaking about my weight, obviously, not as much as I thought.

Annie: Is it too much or too challenging?

Laura: No no no! It's healthy challenging... it's making me question language...

Similarly, Sarah indicated:

This blog has been quite an emotional journey for me so far, I enjoy writing it very much and will continue to do so, maybe even documenting my thoughts after the project is over – Congratulations, you've turned me into a blogger and made me feel special all at the same time!

The blogs proved to be very rich data collection points; however, they required a greater investment in time from the researcher to keep the conversation flowing, to answer technical queries and to fix technical issues compared with a more traditional journal or face-to-face interview.

I found that the face-to-face interaction with participants was quite an important complement to help me build a trust relationship with the participants and get a better grasp of their ideas. Whilst writing can be good to emphasise certain terms and ideas, I found that face-to-face interviews allowed me to capture certain emotions (intonations, quivering voice, laughs, ironic tone) much easier, especially given that I

am a non-native English speaker. Finally, I thought face-to-face meetings were often more efficient for planning purposes given the photo session component.

Four participants including me did follow through with the blog. The blogging period ranged from three weeks to one and a half months. Two participants started the blog but decided to revert to email and face-to-face conversations due to technical difficulties with the blogs. Two participants expressed their preferences for a face-to-face conversation format from the start, given that they did not feel that comfortable with computers. I had at least one formal preparatory face-to-face conversation with six of the seven participants (other than myself), which took between 45 minutes and one hour. Two face-to-face conversations took place right before the photo session itself (in Quebec) because the participants did not take to blogs. These two participants were briefed beforehand with a few guide questions and invited to envision their photo session (as well as to keep me informed for planning purposes).

As the blog session came to an end, I tried to get the participants to be as detailed and directive as they could in terms of their envisioned photo session concept. Once this was established, we put together a list of the required location, props, clothes and accessories. Most participants actively collaborated in the photo shoot preparation process (and also offered to help out or lend items for other participants) which contributed in some ways to their ownership of the project.

My hope was to stay true to their vision, whilst trying to stay within a £100 budget for each photo session, including 'catering' (snacks and bubbly) and travel expenses. This was sometimes tricky given the lists of (at times exotic) elements required. Concessions sometimes had to be made, but overall we, as a group, did manage pretty well to stay close to both visions and budget. This was achieved with the generosity of people allowing us to use their location for free or a small fee, but also by bringing in items of our own, borrowing (from friends, local businesses, drama department wardrobe) and finding creative solutions for costumes and props. Although it was at times hard to emulate exactly the same standards as marketplace imagery when this was the wish of participants, budget restrictions fostered a climate of collaboration and creativity. It was an opportunity to document priorities in terms of self-presentation, by assessing the importance and meaningfulness of elements for

the participants. It was also a way to realise how creative and resourceful one can be in achieving a certain output, beyond supermodel codes.

Location was determined by discussing with participants and focusing on their ideas and inspirational photos. The idea, again, was to find the right setting for their envisioned self-presentation, whilst having somewhere that was convenient and suitable for a private photo session. Some preferred the option of doing their photo session in their own environment, whether in their garden or workshop. The first photo sessions were done in 'external' locations (Poltimore House, a manor house in restoration, a hotel pool and a sofa shop). However nice that it was to use these facilities, we experienced pressing time and coordination issues. We therefore adopted a more practical approach, trying to use locations that (although still in line with the participant's visions) could be set up in advance and/or used for an unhurried photo session, such as the photographer's studio and my house. Although the staff in the previously mentioned locations were very good at giving us privacy during the photo sessions, I also found these closed locations more appropriate for more intimate, often 'first-time' photo sessions.

5.3.2. Photo session

The photo session was the core part of the project. Its goal was to give the participants an opportunity to enact their ideal self-presentation, yielding them as much freedom as possible in the process. Again, explicit focus was put on creating a positive, comfortable and dignifying experience for them. Participants generally seemed quite calm on the day of the photo session; however, some blog entries suggest that some participants experienced a mixture of nervousness and excitement.

eeeeeeek getting very nervous but working on poses (SJ, blog)

I will be practising my 'come hither' look tonight! (Sarah, blog)

I'm a bit nervous about the whole underwear thing but I think it will be... fine... but I really feel it's so important cause I wish... I wish I'd seen that when I was 16, 17 (Michaela, briefing session)

[I'm feeling] a bit nervous but it's ok... I think it's fantastic! Food looks amazing, my hair looks amazing... (Laura, briefing session)

I was personally quite nervous during the photo sessions, especially the first ones, because I really wanted to not only make it the best possible experience for the participants but I also wanted to make sure that it was done in a manner that would be appropriate for the purpose of the research (often having to review and adjust my initial protocol).

The duration of each photo session was approximately one hour, plus the briefing, preparation and set-up time. A briefing session took place prior to the start of the photo sessions to enable the participants to voice their concept in as much detail as possible. The photographer and makeup artist (when involved) asked questions for clarification purpose and participants were welcomed to address any preferences or queries (such as lighting, layout, or styles and effects).

Whilst the participants were expected to enact their creative vision for the portrait and the photographer, to capture that vision, my role was to assist both of them, making sure they had everything they needed to ensure the flow of the process and the best possible experience for the participant. Notably, I held lighting reflectors, brought required props, touched-up hair and costumes, refilled bubbly glasses and brought nibbles.

Though I invited the first participants to voice their intent whilst engaging in certain poses and facial expressions, I soon found out that this was breaking the flow and, sometimes, even making them feel too self-conscious, which was an unwanted outcome of the process. I thus decided to ask them to voice their intent retrospectively, in the review session.

The photo sessions were audio recorded (except mine, which was under water, but conducted under the observation of another participant), in order to help me account for the process and interactions. Light conversations seemed to put the participant at ease, and deter their focus from the fact that they were photo captured

and observed by a researcher. I noted down my own impressions as a researcher after the session. Several participants immediately discussed their impressions of the photo session after the event, and supplemented their input with blog entries.

Generally, participants' confidence in their movements and poses seemed to grow after an initial, slightly tense, warm-up session. Some of them also started asking more and more about possible poses, shot distances, camera angles, lighting effects and inclusion of new props. Some participants asked for poses focusing on certain traits or body parts, such as hands and face, whilst others asked to conceal body parts they were less comfortable with. The photographer always offered the participants the opportunity to have a look at the photos at some point during the session, to ensure they would be satisfied, or to suggest different layouts. This was an opportunity for the participants to voice their impression (generally very appreciative) as well as stating some preferences and special requests. When participants seemed a bit 'stuck' we suggested some poses and props, which also seemed to stimulate the creativity and confidence of the participants, who then suggested other poses and scenarios. In the end, this seemed appreciated and contributed in making the experience of this research more enjoyable for the participants.

The photo session appeared to be, for most, a fun time, and an occasion to indulge in the experience, as opposed to one where they felt scrutinised by an objectifying researcher. I had the feeling with one participant, however, that she was very concerned about wanting to make sure I was happy with the photo session, whereas I kept on reminding her that the focus should be on how she wants to be portrayed. This was early on and therefore I re-emphasised this with other participants prior to their photo sessions. When prompted for suggestions for improvement, the first participant suggested for others to be given the opportunity to have makeup and hair done if desired. As she pointed out, 'even though I love doing my hair and makeup, I think it would have made me feel more the centre of attention if this could have been done for me' (SJ, post-photo-session blog). As a result, a professional makeup artist – Kelly Stewart – became involved in the project. It was impossible to coordinate a makeup session with all the participants due to time and location constraints, and a few participants did not feel inclined to have makeup or hair done by someone else, as they wanted to be represented as they would on their own, normally or on a special

occasion. For those who could and opted to work with her, Kelly's presence seemed to enhance the experience for these participants; as it was, not only a time to be cared for, and 'done up' according to their vision, but a time to relax in the hands of a caring professional.

Most participants indicated their appreciation of the level of care they received during the photo session. Though the purpose of the research was no longer to be 'transformative' in intent, participants' accounts generally suggest that it achieved its goal of creating an enjoyable research experience for them.

I really enjoyed the shoot [and] it made me feel very special. I cannot wait to see the photos. I enjoyed the whole experience apart from my very painfully cold feet (so thought I had packed my slippers)... I really enjoyed being able to do some poses that I have seen in Vogue for years and to push myself to do those kind of shapes. I felt in control of the poses to a certain extent but obviously a little limited because [of] the spaulder issues, but it looked so cool it was worth it... I have never done anything like this before because I never thought I could as [a] curvy girl and I am not very image confident. I would definitely do something like this again. I really enjoy fashion and getting dressed up. Plus of course I love being centre of attention. (SJ, post-photo-session blog)

I have had my picture taken. I am a super model! Goodness, there's nothing quite like it to perk you up and make you feel a little special. (Louise, post-photo-session blog)

I was very nervous but you all put me at ease. I felt comfortable with the clothing and accessory choices I had made (zip malfunction excepted). I thought the setting at Alice's house was perfect and made me feel as though I was in the 50's. The food was fab, definitely adding to the moment. I did feel uncomfortable while she was taking the pictures, merely as I had not done any form of modelling before and I felt awkward. Of course since then I keep thinking of poses etc. that may have worked but I was a bit stuck at the time. I loved the couple of shots I saw, and [am] really looking forward to reviewing them properly. (Laura post-photo-session email)

Well, my goodness me! That was an amazing experience! I must say from the minute I was picked up in a proper black London cab until I was dropped back at my front door, clutching half a bottle of bubbly, I felt like a celebrity! (...) I felt incredible during the shoot, there was encouragement coming from everyone. I feel I managed to encapsulate my vision for my shoot as well as I possibly could have done. (Sarah, post-photo-session blog)

I really loved the photo shoot. Hair and make-up was so lovely done and I also felt really pretty. Alice got exactly the 'mood for the shoot' I was after. It was good that I could change into different positions and therefore find out what feels most comfortable. I had no issue with being seen in underwear which helped. I was also able to relax to just go with the flow – I found it very exciting 😊 and had a great experience doing it. (...)I absolutely loved the whole photo shoot and thanks to all of you lovely ladies who made it such a great experience. (Michaela, post-photo-session blog)

My own account:

My personal photo session was conducted with the assistance of SJ, a participant who volunteered her help. SJ collaborated with the logistics; helping out with props and outfit; making suggestions; stabilising my feet as I was swimming towards the camera; helping out with the light sources. She also acted as 'moral support' and observer for my interaction with participants during the photo session (the intent was a role reversal). The latter was quite difficult because most of the process happened under water or verbal interactions were muffled by the sound of diving equipment and water pumps.

With two photographers on board and SJ to observe, this photo session was both a bit thrilling and nerve wrecking, and also a humbling process due to feeling like 'the centre of attention'. Although I have had experience taking photos for fun with Alice before, and despite the fact that I am well aware that there were no particular expectations in terms of photo outputs, I could relate to some of the participant's potential concerns and anxieties. In one respect, I

was nervous because of the technical aspects required in my underwater photo session, and I also did not know exactly how and if my concept would come together as a meaningful whole. I was also slightly worried about the message I would send across with my photo session – would it be interpreted properly? – in full awareness that these could be scrutinised by members of my research community. In this sense, I could anticipate that participants could be slightly nervous to think that their photo sessions would be interpreted by a researcher and potentially put out there for strangers to see.

In retrospect, I quite enjoyed the photo session under water, though it was very different (and much more difficult) from my normal practice of swimming. My focus was less about the enjoyment of my body in water, and movement, and more about trying to coordinate myself with the photographer – in order to at least be in the frame – and hold my breath long enough and in a manner that would not look so uncomfortable. (Annie, notes)

5.3.3. Personal review

Conforming to best practices of the photovoice approach discussed by Ozanne et al. (2013), the resulting visual images were meant to be used in order to both further discussions within this research and act as an alternative visual account coming from the perspectives of fuller-figured individuals. The aim of the photo review was for the participants to select their favourite photos as well as to further emphasise what they wanted to put across with their photo sessions, and to what extent they considered this had been achieved.

Personal review sessions generally took the form of a recorded face-to-face conversation where participants would first see and comment on their photos (except for two in Quebec, with whom this process was initiated by videoconference, and finished by email in one case). Review sessions were set up according to the participants' preferences, generally one or two weeks after the photo session. Locations for the reviews were also determined according to the participants' preferences; these were either set up in my office, the photographer's studio, the participant's home, a cafe or a restaurant. Personal reviews took an average of 45

minutes. Reviews were audio recorded as well as written up. Participants were allowed to navigate the different photos freely, and comment whenever they pleased. I suggested using a star rating system in order for participants to identify their favourite photos. Most of them found this useful and followed through this idea. Participants were prompted with further questions when judged appropriate, to further my understanding of their intention or feeling about a photo.

On the whole, participants were pleased with the outcome of the photo sessions and resulting images, even one who was slightly reluctant to be pictured in the first place. It felt great when participants were proud of their images, managed to encapsulate what they wanted to put across and had a sense of loving what they saw of themselves. Again, however, it would be wrong to suggest that all the comments about the depicted self were positive.

5.3.4. Group review

Most participants were very intrigued about others' photo sessions; and, in part, to foster some form of collective ownership of the project, a group review session was also set up in a meeting room at the University of Exeter. This was in line with the photovoice approach, where the option of participating and having one's photos featured in a group review was offered to the participants. Thus, 'participant photographers [gathered] for group analysis of their photos to identify shared issues' Ozanne et al. (2013: 47). The other goal of this group review was to foster a group discussion on meanings and perceived issues as well as to involve the participants to a certain extent in the process of interpretation and representation in the research. This enabled me to directly challenge some of my emerging interpretations and explore new avenues considered meaningful to participants.

Whilst all the participants signified being interested in a group review, it was impossible to manage a complete group session due to location, time differences, availabilities and last-minute unforeseen circumstances. Participants that could not attend were, nonetheless, invited to review the group images electronically.

Prior to the group review session, a handful of favourite photos selected by

each participant were edited by the photographer and projected onto a big screen. Upon my agreement with them, a few photos were selected (by the photographer) for two participants who had not yet had their review sessions.

The group review was two hours long and was audio recorded, plus written up by me. However, two hours, which was initially thought of as an appropriate amount of time (considering busy participants' schedules), was too brief a period in order to bring the discussion to a natural close. Fortunately, participants were also given a simple comment sheet to write down their impressions of the photos before a group discussion ensued. As such, a good level of personal impressions was captured in spite of time constraints. Furthermore, as noted by Ozanne et al., *'[o]ne dilemma [in typical photovoice group reviews] is that in the search for group consensus, important individual insights or diverse perspectives will be lost'* (2013:52). These comment sheets were thus an opportunity to capture and keep a strong focus on the individual perspectives to avoid suggesting that there is such a thing as one consensual fuller-figured perspective.

The session started with a formal greeting and explanation of the process. Participants were then invited to introduce themselves one by one, and to describe in a few words the intent behind their photo shoot (for instance, what they wanted to put across, or not, as well as things that were important or significant for them). We then started the projection of the nine participants' photos. I introduced the concept and intent for the participants who could not join us (as per their own accounts). Participants were asked to compare photos, highlight what they could see as similarities and differences between them, as well as noting down how they related to the presented images. Following the projection (which took approximately 30 minutes, and which was punctuated by comments), participants were invited to share their impressions with the group.

The group review process engendered a connection for the participants, who quickly bonded together as a group and seemed very pleased with the visual outcome of the project. The session turned out to be quite fun, laid-back and fuelled by inclusive exchange. As the pictures were presented, participants readily expressed their appreciation for the photos. As I realised that the participants kept on showering

images with compliments, I decided to emphasise the importance of highlighting meanings in relation to the picture (on the participant sheet) to increase my understanding. As such, participants also voiced or wrote down some of their critiques and concerns about certain representations. Participants were often inquisitive about the meanings of certain elements and asked to go back to certain photos during and after the slideshow in order to take notes.

At the end of the group review (and within conversations for those who were absent), participants were asked if they would be interested in putting together and being featured in a public exhibition on the project. All participants agreed. This project is to be undertaken, in collaboration with the participants, mid-2014.

5.4. Data transformation

As mentioned in the epistemological framework, I opted for a focus on description (participant's accounts and portraits), paired with a creative interpretation as a mode of data transformation.

Participants were involved to some extent in the process of interpretation, via individual and group review sessions, as well as in discussions of interpretive avenues. Whilst I would have liked to further include the participants in the process of interpretation, time constraints and distances made this process difficult. Though I understand that this does not qualify as a full participatory method, I tried to give an optimal amount of space to the participants' explanations, using literal quotes from blogs, emails, conversations, and personal and group reviews. I have also conducted as many 'participant checks' as possible to make sure my interpretation (representation within the research) would be appropriate and representative of the perspectives of the participants. I have also tried to keep track of my own reflective account of the research process.

My interpretation was based on a hermeneutic interpretative process, previously used and discussed by several consumer researchers (see for instance Fischer & Arnold, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994). I conducted an isolated interpretation of each of the participant's

data sets (blogs, emails, conversation content (transcribed verbatim) and photos) highlighting emergent semiotic and discursive elements (themes), tensions and contradictions, as well as contextual factors. Then, stepping away from individual 'decoding', I reinterpreted these data sets 'in relation to the developing sense of the "whole"' (Thompson et al. 1994), iteratively trying to see what united and distinguished participants' data sets. Thus, just like Thompson and Hirschman:

[My] interpretations were therefore neither fully deduced in an a priori fashion nor induced in the classical sense; rather, they emerged from an interplay between (...) initial preconceptions and the insights and unexpected results that arose through the actual conduct of the study. (1995: 141)

As per my feminist research stance, I placed particular emphasis on the personal accounts of the participants to try to grasp their intention. However, this approach, akin to what Bevir terms 'procedural individualism', 'does not presuppose any of the other doctrines that have gone by the name of individualism; it commits us, for instance, neither to an atomist individualism according to which individuals could exist, grasp meanings, or perform actions apart from society, nor to a methodological individualism according to which we should study society without referring to social wholes' (Bevir, 2000: 6-7).

In this sense, whilst my interpretation focused greatly on the intentions and meanings put forth by the individual participants to make sense of their selves and bodies, it also sought to identify socio-cultural factors and discourses that could help make sense of the themes emerging from their accounts. As such, their 'narratives of personal history are situated in a broader cultural system of meanings that have been diffused through advertising, mass media, educational curriculum and the "collective meanings" used to create a sense of a shared social identity among individuals' (Thompson, 1997: 449).

I was also inspired by the double hermeneutic process characteristic of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) studies, used in psychology, where a 'reflective engagement with the participant's account' allows some of my impact on the research and participants' representation to be addressed (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin,

2009: 80). This principle calls for a constant awareness that ‘the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking’ (Smith et al., 2009: 80). Conforming to the feminist epistemological stance, IPA thus also necessitates a form of transparency about the researcher’s envisioned presence in the research output. This notion of double hermeneutic became particularly important because I took part in this project as a participant-researcher. Whilst it enabled me to be aware of my own bias, my embodied involvement as a participant-researcher also had other related purposes. First, it helped to sensitise me to the experience of the participants and enabled me to keep in mind issues that might affect their dignity and safety, in formulating and diffusing the research account. It also helped me to put across my own feelings and ideas in my profile and portraits in such a way that can enable outside interpreters to further discern or ‘bracket’, my own biased perspective, influenced by my acquaintance and affinities with fat studies and size/fat acceptance activism. However, my embodied participation as a fuller-figured participant-researcher should also be seen as an input contributing to the knowledge ‘about’ (instead of ‘knowledge of’) larger individuals (Bristor & Fischer, 1993), and as an assertive ‘political’ gesture of fat acceptance in its own right. This being said, whilst my perspective is valid and potentially different from that of other participants, and whilst I have tried to include and acknowledge participants as experts, it is fairer to say that I have had a dominant influence on this research, which I have tried to be transparent about via the process of double hermeneutics. From a more technical perspective, in order to help with the organisation of the emerging interpretive themes, I have used the qualitative analysis coding software NVivo during my first exposure to the transcripts, and later, the ‘mindmapping’ software Mindjet.

Overall, as previously mentioned, the research process was far from being a straightforward, linear and clear-cut one. It required my confrontation to various challenges, which I tried to ‘work out’ (Bettany, 2007) to the best of my intellectual and reflexive capacity and with the guidance of existing feminist research literature. In various sections throughout the thesis, I tried to provide an account of the research process – thus highlighting the conduct and issues encountered – as well as my own human traces to emphasise how this research is first and foremost ‘the view from a body, always complex, contradictory... versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity’ (Haraway, 1991: 195, cited by Bettany 2007). This created an

opportunity to be reflexive (self-aware) about some of my biases, as well as about some of the limitations of this research. As Bettany suggests, *'[o]ne of the central planks behind "working it out" was understanding the value of "not knowing" (...) allowing myself to be an uncertain subject within my own writing'* (2007: 78). This asserted ambiguity on my part, at the same time, creates space for participants to define themselves beyond what I – as a (budding) consumer researcher – make of them and their accounts.

5.5. Conclusion

In short, this research is inspired by a photovoice approach, which is conforming to several feminists' principles identified in the epistemological framework. These principles include valuing the voice and expertise of the participants and getting them actively involved in the research process. However, whilst more traditional photovoice research studies focus on the emancipation and consciousness rising of the participants – as per the research instigator's political agenda – this research does not specifically pursue these goals. My goal is to privilege the voice and perspectives of the participants, make sure that they feel cared for in the process of this research, and that they get something out of it too.

As encouraged by feminist research principles, I have taken the freedom to make a few 'creative' adjustments with the photovoice conventions to better meet the goals of this research and ensure ownership (which was desired by the participants) of the resulting images. My creative adaptation involves self-portraiture, which includes the involvement of a photographer as a means to ensure the most satisfactory output and experience for the participants. Self-portraiture is combined with the use of blogs, emails and face-to-face conversations as a means of capturing the preparation and review process of the participants. Another decision is that of keeping the names of the participants associated with their portraits and contents, as a means to give them ownership of the project. As per photovoice principles, a group review session was also conducted as a means of further involving the participants in the interpretation process. This was combined with a series of participants' checks to ensure the appropriateness of my depiction and interpretation of their accounts.

As we have seen, the sample was composed of a small, but purposeful, sampling, involving lay women, self-identifying as larger, and showing a certain type of assertiveness about their identity. The data collected in the various steps of this research was interpreted with a hermeneutic interpretative framework. In order to avoid 'closing' the meanings associated with the participants' depictions, I tried to engage in a reflexive process throughout this project, and to remain transparent about issues encountered. This is also facilitated by my participation in this project, which further allows me to expose some of my pre-existing biases to the reader.

6. Data presentation

6.1. Establishing terminology

For Bristor and Fischer (1993) – who borrowed the perspective of poststructuralist feminists –, careful attention to language and its political implications needs to be brought to our research. However, selecting the most appropriate political term may infringe the necessity to care for the participants' perspectives and dignity.

To most fat studies scholars and members of the fat acceptance movement, the use of the term fat has been adopted as the politically-appropriate way to refer to bigger, larger people. Indeed, *'the negative connotations of [the adjective 'fat'] have been contested by participants in the Fat Acceptance Movement'* (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013: 1239). To them, the term 'fat' – as opposed to 'obese', 'overweight' (which are terms laden with medical and negative moral connotations) or 'chubby', 'chunky' (which can be read as moral euphemisms that hide a negative moral discourse) – is seen as the acceptable and inclusive term (which can be used to signify both a physical state and a state of mind).

However, the use of this 'appropriate' political term to refer to these participants (who are not fat studies scholars or fat activists) might not be exempt from negative effects. Indeed, most participants voiced how the 'fat' adjective as an identity construct made for uneasy emotions such as shame and feelings of failure.

Well I can't complain with being called fat because I am fat but it doesn't mean I would like someone to call me that. (Laura blog)

Words like fat and obese make me feel like I have failed or I should feel ashamed of looking the way I do. They make me feel guilty that I have not 'achieved' being thin. (Michaela, blog)

In this sense, whilst selecting politically-correct terminology is important, careful attention needs to be applied so that the adoption of a term does not supersede the dignity of, or silence the participants' perspectives.

But what can be done when several participants' preferred terms – such as

'curvy' and 'voluptuous' – do not astutely refer to the aspect of body size (commonly referred to as the general term 'fat' in academia and size acceptance movements) involved in this research?

I see myself as a very feminine, curvaceous, voluptuous girl/woman (depends on the day and circumstance). I like to use those expressions as they have a positive note to them. They somehow 'allow' me to be the way I am without a guilty conscious – the opposite I can be proud of who I am and the way I look. I think 'full-figured' and 'curvaceous' is a good expression for others to describe me but I will keep thinking on this one :). (Michaela, blog)

I think for the most part, the euphemisms used to describe fat women are awful. The words themselves seem to have very specific connotations when they are used. Curvaceous, voluptuous, big-boned, well-endowed, chunky, hefty, plump, oversize, solid, stout, buxom, chubby, full-figured, ample....the list goes on. A number of these terms relate in particular to the chest size. Bizarrely, they are the ones I don't mind. But I think, as every ahem, 'full-figured' lady knows, when the media talk about voluptuous and curvaceous, what they mean is Jennifer Lopez, Kelly Brook and Christina Hendricks. (Louise, blog)

Hogg et al. (2000) emphasise the important feminist principle of addressing emotional issues openly in research, as they are a precondition for an honest, two-way dialogue. Taking the opportunity to address emotions, intents and concerns on both researcher and participants' sides, around the delicate notion of terminology, can be an important source of insights with regards to identity theories and ways of conducting research. In this sense, an open dialogue took place about the issue of terminology from the inception of the research. After 'capturing' how participants referred to themselves, like to be referred to as, and dislike being referred to as, I did clarify my use of the term fat as a political term and highlighted my personal preferences for terms such as 'full-figured' or 'enrobée'¹² in daily life. I then entered into a dialogue with the participants to find a term that would more astutely represent

¹² 'Enrobée' is a Quebecer/French expression literally translated as 'coated', typically used as a 'polite' term to refer to larger individuals, especially women (with an allusion to candies that are coated with a layer of chocolate, for instance).

the category of embodiment at stake in the research, whilst addressing their concerns and interests.

Linda: You noticed I was uncomfortable, didn't you? (...) Should I say 'enrobée' [coated], fat? Yes, because you know, fat of course has a pejorative connotation (...) I'm being careful... Because it's not... In my head, fat is not necessarily pejorative. But socially, yes it is. But I like the term 'enrobée' (...) because you can be 'enrobée de plein d'amour' [coated with lots of love], you can be 'enrobée' with (giggles)... You are 'enrobée'... 'Enrobée' with what? Ah! Come and see for yourself! (giggles) You know... I like this word 'enrobée' because it does not define. I do not like definition. I do not like to be defined. You know, fat defines something. (Linda, pre-photo-session conversation)

Though I wish I could have used a term that literally came from the participants, I came up with the term 'fuller-figured' as it emerged from my reflection on the thesis project, and seemed to be fitting in light of the different concerns and interests that were voiced by participants as part of their accounts. The term was deemed acceptable by all participants.

The term 'fuller-figured' refers to the notion of 'figure' or 'shape' (which is so dear to most participants) yet it is not constrained by the idea of a particular silhouette, or inflection ratio (curviness). Since 'full-figured' is typically used to refer to women in a fashion context it does evoke the notion of 'femininity', which is also valued by most participants in favoured terms such as 'voluptuous' or 'curvaceous'. Fuller-figured, importantly, if only for me in the context of this research, also encompasses the vague notion of 'larger size'. The prefix 'fuller', though, suggests a body that is (at least slightly) larger than the 'norm' (not to confuse with the average). In my discussion with some participants, the term 'full' has also been identified as much preferable to its antonym 'empty' (which was also connoted with the idea of 'whole', as opposed to 'partial' or 'incomplete').

The use of the term 'fuller', as opposed to 'full' (as in the more commonly used fashion term full-figured), however, arose from the concern emitted by some participants about the literality and fixity of certain terms (such as 'round', 'large',

or 'fat'). The term 'fuller' is not only more inclusive of any size above the 'norm', and open to interpretation, it can also be seen as more 'forgiving' by some participants who, at times, experience anxieties about their size. Finally, the term 'fuller-figured' is seen as less objectifying as 'plus-size' (associated with a clothes range), or 'fat', which can be interpreted as a substance, or in one participant's words: 'what I have rather than what I am'.

Despite its lack of popularity among participants, fat is a comforting term for an academic since it is associated with a stream of literature and a set of politics. Though 'fuller-figured' is a much less 'hygienic term' (Hogg et al., 2000) than the academic and political keyword 'fat', and though quite 'clumsy', it encompasses several identity complexities shared by the participants (including me) and still enables me to rally this research (though not as smoothly as I would have hoped) with the fat studies scholarship I borrow from and hope to contribute to, aside from consumer research.

6.2. Participants' perceptions of the marketplace

In this section, I give a quick overview of participants' verbalised thoughts and feelings about the current representation of fuller-figured individuals (or lack thereof) as well as the availability of clothes in the marketplace. This is to help contextualise their envisioned self-presentations.

Participants generally voiced how they do not feel adequately represented in visual culture and catered for in the fashion industry because of their size and shape. Most participants indicated feeling sad and disappointed about the sole idealisation of slenderness; a form of embodiment they suggest having all aspired to at some point in their life but now often considered as oppressive, and unrealistic for them.

Modern mainstream visual culture and fashion imagery doesn't feature large women. The media 'norm' is for very thin models and celebrities. The pressure for women to be glamorous, anorexically skinny and clad in designer labels is immense, and everywhere. The cult of celebrity is thin. To emulate the body images on display in magazines and movies, women go to extraordinarily masochistic lengths. Thank heavens for liposuction and the cayenne pepper

diet! There are no supersize super models. It's a bit like the chicken and the egg. What came first, the teeny tiny clothes or the teeny tiny models? (Louise, pre-photo-session blog)

In the previous quote, Louise ironically suggests the extent to which women need to go to conform to the thin ideals. She also highlights that there are no 'super-size super models' (what she actually means by that is that there are very few of them), because they are limited to a size 12–14. Some have come to dismiss models as not meaning to represent anyone, but to act as 'clothes hangers' in a designer-dominated system.

Generally speaking, it was felt that the idealisation of slenderness and lack of 'positive' depiction of a variety of women found in reality have had an important effect on participants' self-esteem. This is something that most participants have, or still endeavour, to overcome.

Had I seen more magazines with fuller-figured people, had I seen more films... If I were to see more, life, precisely... normal life... Yes, I would have accepted [my size] sooner (...) If you see magazines, if you see films, if you go to the shops and you find clothes that fit, and where you realise that wearing a size 14 or 16 is normal [it's easier to accept your size]... (Linda, conversation)

A large part of participants' concerns is directed towards younger generations who are thought of as more vulnerable due to their age and being targeted with unrealistic feminine images. This was reported to be especially the case with today's visual culture such as cartoons, music videos, films and fashion magazines. Participants often referenced their own past experiences of feeling inadequate to empathise with younger females. There is definitely a shared wish from the participants to see these younger girls avoid the feeling of inadequacy and self-hatred that often come hand in hand with not corresponding to the currently glamorised slender ideals.

By [the time these children were] seven, what I saw was that there was a kind of self-consciousness that in my generation was only present in

14-year-olds... so the human process is speeding up. And I see on the television, you know, America and glamour cartoons, sort of the girl heroes, and they're all skinny, with slick long hair... all this kind of stuff... and I see in my own granddaughter, how upset she gets if she doesn't look right and how desperately upset she can be ... it's just awful.
(Elizabeth conversation)

Several participants also voiced feeling saddened about the dominant depiction of larger individuals either as an object of shame or laughter. Whilst these depictions clash with their own self-concepts, there is generally this sense that these representations feed into (less significant) others' perceptions and expectations of fuller-figured individuals in general.

Most participants, however, have indicated being pleased that there is an increasing amount of fuller-figured individuals appearing in celebrity culture, such as Adele, Nigella, Queen Latifah and Beth Ditto as well as 'plus-size' models such as Sophie Dahl, Emme, Candice Huffine, Kate Dillon and others. A few younger participants voiced how they had been disrupted by their first exposure to depictions of larger women portrayed as beautiful, sexy and confident, and how these images have stayed ingrained in their memory as a catalyst for self-esteem.

[T]hinking back when I was younger and it was really quite difficult to see those magazines, 'cause that's what you do as a girl, you buy magazines and then you read them and then to not be represented... I remember when Sophie Dahl came on I was like (gasp) finally someone that kind of represents something else and it was really such a relief and a true... but it just wasn't regularly enough... (Michaela, conversation)

Michaela, referring to a 'plus-size' model swimsuit shot where protruding flesh had not been edited out, later added:

[T]he first time I saw [this picture of a plus-size model in a swimming costume, prominently showing the fleshy folds of skin on her back] that was really funny 'cause I look at myself in the mirror and that's what I see, you know... that's

what I see... Of course I see those little fatty... love handles... the first time I saw this [picture] I was like 'oh my God! I can't believe they've shown that!' Then I'm thinking 'luckily they have shown that'... but even I am so conditioned that by now when I look at this (...) my first thought is 'oh my God I can't believe they didn't Photoshop this out' which is weird, isn't it? 'cause actually it would be lovely to see much more of this so that it would just be a normal [occurrence, and not for a cause] (Michaela, pre-photo-session conversation)

'I love this picture it's just so... she's got a belly bump... its brilliant!' (Michaela, pre-photo-shoot conversation)

I also vividly remember my first exposure to plus-size models:

January 2001, I was 19 at the time... I remember coming across a magazine cover featuring a gorgeous – 'fuller-figured!' – model on display at my regular newsstand. Kate Dillon on the cover of the new plus-size Mode Magazine. I can still remember the shock – the shivers even – I experienced. As a young woman who felt unworthy because of my consistent failure to remain thin, this cover suddenly gave me the possibility to 'exist', so to speak. (Annie blog)

However, there is a shared sense by a few participants that the depictions of 'plus-size' models are quite generic, both in terms of physical appearance (long hair, dominantly white, generally limited to size 14, with an hourglass figure, and similar facial features) and expression. Some participants also pointed out how they feel unrepresented due to their age, perhaps, often more so, at times, in combination with their size. This is also a concern to consider as an issue of body diversity.

Some participants also applauded the comeback of retro imagery and more curvy 'figures' (such as the character Joan from Mad Men, played by Christina Hendricks), which are believed to contribute, even if slowly, to the positive integration of body diversity and inclusion of larger figures. However, there is still a long way to go:

I think that curves are coming back.... slowly but surely, however I feel we have

a way to go while magazines and other media describe some size 8 girls as 'overweight' due to a ripple of skin hanging over their bikini bottoms. (...) Larger girls are coming back into the media, but are still considered the 'fat' friend amongst the group in many TV shows and magazines. Larger women are not generally represented as 'sexy', in my opinion, in the mass media and fashion. (Sarah, blog)

Louise also points out:

One Beth Ditto does not a fashion u-turn make. No matter how loudly the fashion houses decry, it is still the industry standard. (Louise, blog)

Aside from a few exceptions, participants seem to think that there is much more that can be done to improve the representation of fuller or curvier figures in the marketplace imagery. It was also argued, by several participants, that fuller-figured individuals featured, for instance, in talent competition shows on TV, seem to have had much less care given to them when stylists are involved, than their more slender counterparts – a fact participants find extremely irritating.

All participants indicated wanting to see changes in the industry, towards greater inclusion of body diversity. This includes the integration of larger individuals in other roles than those traditionally ascribed to them in visual culture.

I hope, I hope that young people will free themselves from that, you know... That they will not let themselves become neurotic because of their handles (...) No, me... It has to change. I hope to see this before I die. I hope so... (Linda, conversation)

To several participants used to the negative consequences of being rejected from normal or positive depictions, this body diversity should not, however, be at the expense of the inclusion of slender individuals. In this sense, several participants seemed to be sensitive about the definition of 'real' women.

A lot of opinion is that bigger women are 'real-sized', but I feel that this is unfair

to the slimmer people as everyone is 'real-sized' (Sarah, blog)

'[In] visual culture, I would say there is definitely a lack of women... I don't know if I should call them 'real' women... or like 'everyday' women... I think that's more like it' (Michaela, pre-photo-session conversation)

Three participants emphasised the importance of featuring 'healthy' individuals. One of the participants emphasised that health, to her, was determined by the fact of being within a healthy range (which allows for larger bodies than that from the WHO chart, but not much higher). Two other participants used this 'healthy' characteristic to refer to people of different sizes with a 'healthy' lifestyle and attitude.

Though some are pleased to see that there has been an improvement in recent years with the inclusion of larger sizes, and that the internet has facilitated access to more styles, most participants still consider that fashion could do much more to properly cater for them. This is in line with Scaraboto and Fischer's (2013) discussion of 'fatshionistas' and of Tischner's (2013) discussion of larger women more generally who are dissatisfied with the current mainstream offering of clothing in their sizes. One of the main concerns expressed by my research participants was the careless expansion of 'normal' clothes to larger sizes without appropriate concerns to fit for different types of fuller figures:

Most of the stores on the high street don't cater for larger-sized women. There are a few 'specialist' retailers, but for the most part purchasing options for me are limited. If I am lucky, some shops' clothes go up to a size 22. Sometimes they fit, a lot of the time they don't. This is because of the way that the stores pattern cut their garments. Most stores base their range of sizes on the size 10 pattern. This is then scaled up for the bigger sizes. This doesn't account for the actual differences in larger body shapes. There is no accounting for bust, waist and hip measurements. (Louise, pre-photo-session blog)

High street: has got much better there is now size 18 in many shops but again the clothes do not really always suit a fuller figure. (SJ, pre-photo-session blog)

Another important concern is the putting aside of 'plus-sizes' and 'plus-size' models in a different category, which most participants consider as an undesirable form of segregation, and where the resulting clothes are often thought of as of lesser quality and with nondescript, unsuitable style.

[I]n magazines I always find it says 'plus-sized model shoot'... why do you specifically have to mention it? But that's what they do (Michaela, conversation)

Some chains have their own 'plus-size' (another term I cannot stand and find ridiculously patronising!) ranges. To add insult to injury, H&M's plus-size range is called 'Big and Beautiful'. The store's idea of what they think large ladies should/would like to be wearing is VERY different from what I like to wear. A lot of the designs are very lazy and shapeless, and seem to be made of hideous fabrics. Elasticated waists because they can't be bothered to properly measure you. Stick a tent over me and you won't see how fat I am. Occasionally though, I am lucky and will find something I like. (Louise, blog)

The actual shops set aside for plus-size [provide clothing which is] very frumpy and cheap looking with very little or no structure. (SJ, blog)

One participant also suggested that the newly available clothing for larger women is designed with 'young' people in mind; leaving more mature individuals with yet again the poorly designed options.

[U]ntil a couple of years ago if you went from 16 and upwards the styles changed and became rather old-fashioned and for older people... the materials used could also change which I thought 'this is just horrible' but because I think that there's been an inverted comma 'obesity [epidemic]'... and matters of health people are talking about, particularly with younger people, there are some styles which are more fashionable made in larger sizes which I wouldn't wear anyway you know, they're there and the kids do wear them, (Elizabeth, conversation)

Thus, participants expressed their general discontent with fuller-figured women's representation and fashion offerings. However, the desire of several participants to see changes at the marketplace level is heightened by their attraction to, and even passion for, fashion, style, design, aesthetic and visual culture. Several participants hold a background in design or the arts, or are avid consumers of fashion and lifestyle magazines, as well as watchers of TV series such as Britain/America's Next Top Model. Generally speaking, participants were quite literate about fashion trends, representational codes and conventions, and articulate about their own idea of style (contradicting the stereotype that fuller-figured individuals are oblivious to these spheres).

Participants often spoke of fashion as a source of pleasure. Three of them specifically emphasised how they appreciate the creativity and audaciousness of certain designers (much like an art exhibition) and the escapism fashion imagery provides. Thus, it is assumed by these participants that fashion in itself can be appreciated as an art form in its own right, even though they long to be included. Other participants, however, focused on the pragmatic side of clothing, and also indicated that they would like to see more 'realistic' depictions of women, staged in real-life settings.

In sum, there is a palpable sense of deception or frustration of not being positively represented in marketplace imagery. This has often been discussed as associated with the shaping of negative body images and low self-esteem, at a young age, and involved in attempts to achieve more 'idealised' versions of the self via weight-loss projects. Participants often stated their hope that representations will become more inclusive for future generations of girls. They applaud the comeback of curvy icons and the emergence of plus-size models, who, even if limited in terms of look, make some of the participants feel more adequate. Participants also discussed their general dissatisfaction with the clothing offered in their sizes on the market. This is generally seen as a hindrance to the creation of a positive image and self-expression. Several participants self-qualify as visually inclined and as such, see fashion and style as a sphere that is particularly enticing – as a source of passion. Many participants suggested the promising potential of style for improving the image and understanding of larger individuals, if only it were to be made accessible in their

sizes.

6.3. Participants' profiles

In this section, I will present the participants with the help of profiles, crafted from their own ideas, words and pictures. I used my judgement as a researcher to try to convey the essence of their ideas, and in all but one case¹³, the participants' input about their profiles.

Participants will be presented in the same order as their photo sessions, which often coincided with the order of their involvement in the project. Each profile's structure is designed to account for the important ideas that emerged as part of their intended photo session and include a participant selection of their portraits created in the context of this research. Overall, there is a focus on favourite pictures, as well as the more positive meanings in this section. The emergence of more ambiguous, or even at times negative, meanings in participants' accounts will be discussed after the profile presentations. Finally, whilst it would have been insightful for the reader of this thesis to be able to see the numerous images posted by the participants in their blogs or sent by email, copyright issues made it difficult for me to integrate them into this work.

6.3.1. Sara-Jane (SJ)

SJ was the first participant in the project. I had known her for a few months before discussing this project with her. Being a design-inclined person, she seemed very keen to have the opportunity to create her envisioned portraiture. SJ invested a great deal of time in this project, planning the different elements to create a coherent, representative and interesting depiction.

I grew up just adoring couture. So when Annie said 'what do you want?' I said 'are you sure?!' (laughs) So I wanted to do something very couture... My first thought was like 'pin-up', 'sexy'... but I then went 'Am I doing that because it's

¹³ Unfortunately, I did not manage to get hold of Linda, who was contacted by email with an invitation, to proceed to a review of her profile.

the way curvy girls are often portrayed?’ It’s being funny, bubbly, which is fantastic... but to me, as I know, I love couture fashion and I want to be something really strong. (SJ, group review)

Despite her various sources of inspiration for styles, she decided, in her portraiture, to ‘indulge’ (as she puts it) in a bold and theatrical ‘couture’ look inspired by Westwood and McQueen’s styles. Her portraiture also involved fable-like imagery: a combination of dark, organic, gothic elements found in the decor, but at times also whimsical and romantic. There was a clear sense of mystery and drama in the images that she used as inspiration for her portraiture: models were often outrageously attired, with big hair, big makeup, long flowing drape dresses, stern looks, and featured in grand, often derelict, spaces or misty natural settings. There was also a strong emphasis on contrasts, especially between elements such as ‘strength/weakness’, ‘feminine/masculine’ and ‘ruggedness/softness’. Importantly, SJ wanted to create a depiction which was reflective of how she sees herself, or would like to come across in the eyes of the beholder. As she puts it:

My photo shoot. I am still wanting to play with the idea of contradiction. As I have developed as a person I am much stronger and confident so me as the main character in the photo I want to be quite couture and editorial with a fantasy romantic feel which represents the dreamer in me. I want to look strong but feminine. (SJ, pre-photo-session blog)

To SJ, this main part of her photo session – where she is portrayed as outrageous, elegant, mysterious, confident and inaccessible – represented the self she has been putting forward in her real life: her ‘outward personality’. It reflects both a self-confidence – pride in the self – acquired over time, as well as a self-confidence that she wishes to enhance. As such, she also alludes to this image as an armour:

I would like to incorporate some kind of body armour, jewellery, hair pieces and fierce make up. I want this to represent how we dress and use make up as a protective armour. You can make yourself feel stronger and more confident with what you wear or put on your face. It also represents the theatrical side of my personality. (SJ, pre-photo-session blog)

Thus, SJ's integration of body armour, big hair and makeup, has both a playful/fanciful expressive role, and a protective function.

On one hand, she contrasts this character with the 'bubbly', or 'flirty goodtime fat girl' self that she thought she had to develop when she was younger in order to feel attractive. Opting for an inaccessible 'couture' look instead of a more mundane, girl-next-door, pin-up one (increasingly associated with larger models with the popularisation of the neo-burlesque movement) is, to her, a transgression of what she thought has been expected of her in the past. This photo session option is a form of assertion (for her and other fuller-figured women) that fashion, beauty, theatricality and a 'too good for you' attitude are not the exclusive domain of slender models/individuals.

SJ wanted to represent 'femininity' by enhancing her natural hourglass figure, with a corset and expert posture tricks picked up by looking at models and the Britain's Next Top Model show. A drape was fashioned in order to emulate a couture skirt.

The swathes and folds of fabric represent the feminine side of me. (...) I would love to have some kind of corsetry to highlight my hourglass figure as I am proud of my shape. (SJ, blog)

SJ emphasised the 'strength' aspect with a spaulder (a shoulder armour); she picked up the idea of the contrasts between a silky corset and a piece of armour from a fashion runway.

She also made significant use of the set in order to express her state of mind. She opted for a rundown manor house which we had access to, with architectural features suggesting a former time of glory. This destitute setting heightened the photo shoot's sense of melancholy, theatricality and timelessness, and was a perfect setting with which to contrast the immaculate beauty of the main character. SJ, who is very fond of moorland, countryside and being in the outdoors, also wanted to integrate this element in her portrait:

[W]e could dress the set with moss and ivy and make it seem quite fantasy-like.

The nature part of the shoot represents my deep-rooted personality and love of nature and space, whether that be physical space or head space to be able to think and breathe and be quiet... (SJ, pre-photo-session conversation)

On the other hand, SJ contrasts this main character with her more vulnerable 'inward' self that she describes as more 'anxious', 'fragile' or even 'slightly mad'. To SJ, however, part of achieving confidence is not about suppressing those vulnerabilities or contradictory facets, but rather, it is about acknowledging them as part of herself.

So then, in my photo, on the flip side, I wanted to use elements that showed the more vulnerable side of me.... so more my inward personality and my little quirks, that I may not wear on the outside but they are there... so that's what I want to portray in my photo shoot... Because people will often get me completely wrong... so I kind of wanted to show the outwards and the inwards... and this is SJ (with a low, comedic spooky voice)...' (SJ, group review)

SJ's portrait and accounts thus also point to Tim Burton's theme of the 'misunderstood dreamer': melancholic and distant character (cast in a mysterious gothic-organic setting). It was important to SJ to find a way to show this cohabitation of sides in a visually compelling and legible manner. This notion of the dreamer is enhanced by the integration of the other facets of herself as translucent 'imps', flying around her in lieu of her moral conscience.

Reclaiming these 'traits' and asserting them visually as part of the self-portrait was also, for SJ, a way to express herself as a complex, multifarious individual, and help others understand her as such. Exposing these contradictory facets was not dreaded, but seen as making up for a more unique, authentic, interesting self.

Figure 1 SJ, photographed by Alice Deuchar





Figure 2 SJ, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.2. Louise

I met Louise for the first time at a local vintage fashion fair and was immediately drawn to her vibrant retro style. She kindly accepted my offer to participate in this project and I have since got to know one of the most refreshing and interesting people I have ever met.

As she presents herself:

'The first thing that people usually notice about me isn't that I am 'handsomely upholstered'. (Ugghhh, still can't find a description that suits that isn't the word 'fat!'). Folks might notice my kooky 1950s glasses, my peculiar moon boot shoes, my awesome beads, brooches and baubles or the gorgeous flower in my hair. Usually the first thing that people notice about me are my tattoos (...) It's a bit of a cliché, but my tattoos do tell stories. The tales they tell are about my love for my family, my love of flowers, and my passion for Art. (Louise, pre-photo-session blog)

Louise's idea of an ideal portrait was to open a 'gatefold view' into her universe.

I am really looking forward to having my picture taken for this project. I am nervous too! This is going to be an ideal portrayal of me, hopefully capturing me the way I really am, the way I want the world to see me. I hope it looks true. Of course the scene will be set, but I hope it looks like me, something possible, something natural. A likeness of me inside and out. (Louise, blog)

Louise wanted to show an 'authentic' insider view of her world, expressing her love for the meaningful people around her (such as her husband and children), but also the passions that animate her existence:

I am inspired by colour and pattern. I am inspired by the 'make do and mend' spirit. I am inspired by passion. I am inspired by Art. I am inspired by the dream of brighter. Here are some of my style icons. I like to think I incorporate a little of these wonderful women and their styles in the way I dress, in the way I want the world to see ME! (Louise, pre-photo-session blog)

At this point, Louise chose a self-portrait of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo; an image of the famous samba singer, dancer and actress Carmen Miranda¹⁴; a wartime print of 'Rosie the Riveter'¹⁵; an image of the famous Hawaiian performer Hilo Hattie¹⁶ and one of the famous actress and singer, Dorothy Lamour¹⁷. These women (or icons) can be seen to represent playfulness, glamour, strength, exoticism, wit and sassiness. She also documented her love for colourful flamenco dresses, drag queens, 1950s glamour and the colourful imagery of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Louise, who studied Art History, is a fan of the work of artists Frida Kahlo and Henri Matisse and particularly wanted to 'tip her hat' to these painters in her self-presentation:

The idea is to emulate a portrait of Frida Kahlo. The colours feel like me. They make me smile. Flowers in my hair, flowers everywhere! The 'Matisse' sofa is perfect. It made me catch my breath when I first saw it. The colours are mouth-watering. I would like to have props in the photo that tell the story of what goes on in my life. Maybe some of my children's toys, a signifier for my husband, sewing stuff, favourite things! I would like to be portrayed as if I live somewhere over the rainbow. (Louise, blog)

Whilst she relates to Kahlo's passion, free-spiritedness and metaphorical allusions, Louise wanted to incorporate a similar visual code in her portrait. She also commented that Matisse's 'use of colour is breath taking [and that she feels] serenely happy just looking at his work' (Louise, blog). She also used classical poses found in art, which she interpreted with a quirky twist. According to Louise, the colourful sofa, 'stopped her in [her] tracks' with its appeal, and 'could have fitted in the "Casa Azul"'

¹⁴ Carmen Miranda, aka 'the Chiquita Banana Girl', was popular during the 1930s to 50s.

¹⁵ Rosie the Riveter is the name given to an American cultural icon depicting women working in factories during WWII. One of its best known depictions, specifically referred to by Louise and often used as a feminist symbol of strength and autonomy, is that of a white woman pulling up her sleeves and flexing her biceps with the caption 'We can do it'.

¹⁶ Hilo Hattie was a famous Native-Hawaiian performer in the 1940s and 50s, making use of traditional song and dance with a comedic twist.

¹⁷ Dorothy Lamour was a famous American singer and actress in the 1930s to 50s who often traded on her 'exotic' looks.

(Frida's house), which made it a great fit in her portraiture.

Louise's portrait was created with care, integrating meaningful elements with props of toys (such as Mr Percy, the tattooed strong-man doll iconic of her husband), bright flowers, a statue, jewellery (some of which was made by her children) and a sewing kit (meant to allude to her craftiness and love of the 'make do and mend' spirit). As highlighted by Louise:

I've got all of this stuff so it's nice to know that this photograph is genuine, is something I have been not something I'm buying into. It's nice, it's a good feeling, this is me; it's not me pretending to be something else. (Louise, photo review)

Instead of being scripted, however, Louise's portraiture was very much improvised. She let her feelings and inspiration for the moment guide her poses and interaction with props. During the photo session, she also asked the photographer for close-up shots on her hands:

'Because I use them so much with sewing (...) the most important thing that I have are my hands (...) I am starting to see my mum's hands, which is not a bad thing at all because I love my mum. (Louise, photo session)

Overall, Louise's portrait was meant to be an authentic, yet playful, rendering of her daily life. Louise wanted her portrait to be a distillation of how she perceives herself and her life, or as she writes it, 'Louise in "essence"'.



Figure 3 Louise, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 4 Louise, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.3. Annie (myself)

What I wanted to convey in my photo session was this notion of glamour, old-time glamour. It was a bit of an Esther Williams type of photo shoot although I did not really achieve her prowess. But what I wanted to put across was glamour, with the red bathing suit, colour, the red lipstick... But also this notion of fitness in a sense because I think.... well, to me, as a former swimmer I feel that sometimes people have this idea that I might not be so fit, they have this misconception and then they get surprised when they see me swim, so... I really feel at one in the water, it's really my environment (...) I really enjoy being in it... so that was really what I wanted to put across; a combination of glamour, but also fitness – although I did not manage to [properly] swim because it was technically difficult. (Annie, focus group)

I had a very specific intent in creating my series of portraits: to counter the stereotype of the fuller-figured woman as ugly, unkempt, unfit and unhealthy. I wanted to show a depiction of a not slender individual, me, beautiful, fit, active and presumably healthy.

I find it disheartening that people in general assume that it is necessary to look a certain way to be fit and healthy, and that larger people, by default, are seen as less fit, able and healthy than their skinnier counterparts. In my life I have met very fit, active and healthy fuller-figured individuals, notably whilst being a competitive swimmer. I am, myself, very fit and active, and I eat healthily, despite what would be expected looking at my allegedly 'overweight' and nearly 'obese' BMI. What I find horrendous in this categorical focus on slenderness as a synonym of fitness and adequacy, is the fact that so many people dread engaging in leisure that they would otherwise enjoy and would be good for their health because they are made to feel that their look is inadequate. Or else, several people end up giving up their activity because they fail to achieve its sole purpose of losing weight (generally because weight loss preceded enjoyment as a selection criteria). I have too often fallen into this trap myself whilst feeling too fat to go swimming or dancing – two activities I thoroughly love – or whilst undertaking strict but short-lived exercise regimes at the gym,

where my enjoyment seemed characteristic with that of a hamster forced to run in its cage wheel.

Being photographed swimming is a statement to me. Whilst being picture in a bathing suit is not the easiest thing for me to do, showing my full body, I do this as a statement of acceptance and adequacy. Having my body in movement on display, to me, serves the purpose of showing that it is OK to be seen 'as is' and that active bodies are not necessarily the trim/slender bodies featured in movies, or in holiday and fitness advertising. However, I also want to emphasise the enjoyment of being in the water; of having the freedom to move, feeling the water on my skin as well as experiencing sounds in submersion. This is especially important to me because, in the past, anticipating and focusing on the experience of my body in water, and the overall feeling of well-being after a good swimming session, is what kept me going despite the fear of being seen in a bathing suit at my weight. (Annie, pre-photo-session blog)

I also wanted to emphasise beauty and glamour in my photo session, partly because it took a load off my nervousness at being seen in a bathing suit! Admittedly, my 'look' is not very representative of any given visit of mine to the pool: I have a lot of makeup on, and I opted for a vibrant retro bathing suit and flowery swimming cap (whereas I normally wear a black training costume, latex bathing cap and dark goggles). I wanted to acknowledge my soft spot for old-time, gaudy glamour, which I find playful, theatrical and even flattering on me. I realised after the fact (especially because I had to remain still in the photo session) that I looked more like a synchronised swimmer (a funny fact for me) as opposed to the 'speed swimmer' that I like to think I am.

Though it is something hard to admit for a feminist aspiring academic like me (as it is associated with a feeling of guilt and perhaps regression and superficiality), beauty is an important element to me. Like most other participants, I suffered greatly as a child and teenager due to being made to feel inadequate/unattractive because of my size. As a woman, I have been socialised into placing a lot of importance on beauty, and though I have learned to develop other facets of myself, this idea that achieving physical 'perfection' would make me a more complete person has been quite robust

and hard to get rid of. My understanding of beauty has changed greatly since teenagehood however, partly because I have learned to appreciate the achievement of self-love more so than the achievement of physical 'perfection'. I can readily see beauty in people of different shapes and ages, and can see beauty in myself, which should not be underestimated... not because of my actual look but because of how deeply inadequate I thought my look made me when compared to idealised images.

I believe that, had I been exposed to the valorisation of different forms of embodiments as a little girl, and made to understand the value of my body beyond its sole 'decorative' purpose, my self-acceptance journey would have been easier and faster; a given, almost. Hence, with my representation, I hope to create one of the many types of image I feel I should have been exposed to more often: someone who is 'beautiful', yet whose beauty is not dependent on size or look alone. Someone whose beauty comes from her playfulness and enjoyment of the moment, especially.

Thus, whilst I had specific expectations as to the type of message I was hoping to convey in my portrait, I had no particular pose or facial expression in mind, other than those which would naturally occur as I would swim.



Figure 5 Annie, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.4. Laura

Laura was involved by SJ in the project, right after the latter had completed her photo session. I really enjoyed working with Laura as she is a very positive person and she seemed really motivated by the project. Her idea was initially posing a challenge to my initial vision for this project. I thus further appreciated her involvement, as it made me confront some of my inherent biases and readjust my perspective.

Laura's idea was to create an image that was representative of who she is; though, as she put it, her different identity roles could be difficult to encompass in one photo.

I'm Laura. And I love all to do with vintage and I always have. And obviously now we have some quite good role models in terms of Mad Men with the 50's fashion coming and promoting curvier bodies... and I always had a bit of an unhealthy fascination and love of drinking, eating and socialising... everything (laugh) so I thought it would be a theme that would be very reflective of my personality.... and yeah, so that is what we did and I got to play with Alice's lovely cocktail bar! I loved that! (general laughs) (Laura, focus group)

I feel that I am a strong, sexy, 'real' woman, and that is rarely portrayed. (...) I am a normal 30 something woman, with a great social life, successful career, and also a Mum, so how that is portrayed is difficult. I am different things on different days. I am definitely not the mumsy type, and would not like to me portrayed in that way. (Laura, blog)

[F]ood wise, I think there is an irony about a curvy woman being seen to really enjoy food, having fun with it, food fight, or just tucking in to lots of naughty food. As I say, there is normally a good reason plus-size ladies are so! I don't have a problem with food, I have made a conscious choice not to be a yoyo dieter, I have been this size all my adult life, and as a result I can pretty much eat and drink whatever I want to. My slim friends, particularly men, say they really dislike fussy eaters, or people who obsess over calories, much more fun to get stuck in! Also, I love partying, so drink is major part of my entertainment, nothing like a nice cold pint on a sunny day, or a glass of champagne when dressed up. It

just kind of fits! I have a big personality (quite the stereotype larger lady I think) so the idea of being a queen, or someone else who is the centre of attention seems appropriate. (...)

Perhaps the theme could be lady in cocktail bar. Half eaten plate of food pushed away, smoking a cigarette (with holder of course), and drinking a Manhattan cocktail. I think this is the type of image I have in mind. (Laura, blog)

I remembered feeling slightly troubled when Laura wanted to be portrayed with 'naughty' food, a cigarette and alcohol together. Other participants did not emphasise these elements and I started wondering whether it was a derisory depiction of herself that she was looking to accomplish. However, as she emphasised: *'I love food so actually it makes sense for me to say this is part of my identity and I'm proud of it'*.

In her portrait, Laura wanted to reclaim these elements and create a depiction that could be read as sexy, for disinhibited. She favoured pictures of herself incorporating several elements such as joie de vivre, beauty and poise.



Figure 6 Laura, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 7 Laura, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.5. Sarah

I had recently met and become friends with Sarah when starting this project. Sarah offered her participation to the project the moment I discussed it with her. Her intent, as she put it, was 'to create an image of some excess weight being a positive thing, as long as you're healthy' (Sarah, pre-photo-session blog). She specifically positioned her portraiture in relation to the current lack of positive representations of fuller-figured individuals in marketplace imagery:

I can understand why, in today's culture, larger models aren't used as many see wobbling flesh as unattractive, down to laziness, a sign of not wanting to take care of oneself. In my entire adult life I have never been smaller than a size 14, and I had to work damned hard to get to that size – in fact my boyfriend at the time wanted me to get to a size 12 – a feat that wasn't achievable for me, even when going to the gym almost every day and eating very little. I'm not built for today's modelling world, but I'd love to be a part of helping people see that bigger girls can be dead sexy and rival the skinny [ladies] who can slink into a size 6 dress! (Sarah, pre-photo-session blog)

In my self-portrait, I'd like to try and put across how important having a healthy body and a good attitude equates to sexiness far more than a 2-D pin-up poster girl with big jugs and no arse. It may be attractive at a first glance, but features fade and bodies age. I'd like to include some things I love, like cooking and keeping fit. An artistic interpretation of my hobbies, such as wielding a rolling pin.... (Sarah, pre-photo-session blog)

What I wanted to put across in my photo session was the idea of beauty not being conditional to body size and not necessarily... shape but more to do with an attitude and how a woman can be beautiful even if she hasn't got the most amazing figure in the world ... Figures can always be manipulated and beauty can always be manipulated to become something completely different and depending on what you want to convey yourself as in this shoot... I as a plus-size... wanted to encapsulate sexiness in a burlesque-style. (Sarah, review conversation)

As discussed in her blog posts, Sarah is a multifaceted individual, with various talents and qualities. She describes herself as homely and caring for others, yet also as self-caring and fun-loving. She comes across as witty and very reflexive about her 'self' and the image she is trying to put across. Sarah discussed in length the importance she gives to health and fitness, namely via her active lifestyle and care for food. She points that her current lifestyle has helped her to lose weight, but emphasised that she would not want to become obsessed about weight loss, or lose her 'trademark curves':

Exercise is key to a healthy physique. Whether that physique is curvy or not is a different matter. Some girls will remain the same shape and size whatever they do [...]. I have lost 13lbs so far by eating well and exercising and my shape is the same although a little trimmer. My husband is starting to notice my wobbly bits disappearing and is urging me not to go too far! No chance of that. I love being womanly and most certainly wouldn't want to turn into a Skinny Minnie who only talks about calories and how many jump-squats she'd have to do to burn off that carrot stick she had last week. Indulgence is a must, I don't believe you should ever go wanting, just be more sensible with what you do eat. (Sarah, pre-photo-session blog)

Despite her different facets and hobbies, Sarah opted for the idea of being portrayed in a burlesque-style/setting. She sees burlesque as a type of performance where sexiness is amenable to curves and fuller bodies. As she puts it:

I just adore the titillation and teasing of burlesque that just doesn't happen in regular stripping. It's cheeky, naughty and very sexy. Keeping a few bits of material on is far sexier than having everything out for show, I think. It's just so much fun, not sleazy in any way at all and it's fabulous seeing curvy girls have so much confidence in their bodies. (Sarah, pre-photo-session blog)

Sarah conceptualised her portrait in great detail, from the setting, to the makeup, hair and props. She even created a character that was meant to encompass some of her characteristics as well as the burlesque tongue in cheek sensibility: 'Sassy Maroons'.

I have been thinking for a while about what I would like my concept to be. I would very much like to be set in a glamorous, 1940's inspired parlour (...) I also love the look of the classic 40's pin-up girl images. Such gorgeous soft curves and flowing locks. I imagine my photo shoot taking place amongst red, purple and black drapes, with large fans or feather boas, red lips and with my tattoos a modern twist on the old-fashioned style.

I have my 'costume' all prepared for tomorrow, my black and red corset, tights, boa, hair feather, high heels.....and I'm looking forward to draping myself over the set and being captured by, I am assured, a very talented photographer. I have been looking at other famous pin-up girls too, like Betty Page and the girls who posed in the old seaside postcards. I intend to try to convey a lot of emotion through my eyes, I will be practising my 'come hither' look tonight! (Sarah, pre-photo-session blog)

Though a lot of planning effort was put into the preparation of the portrait, what was important to Sarah during the photo session was to get in her character, let go of her inhibitions and enjoy the experience. As she put it: 'instead of just acting like it, you have to be it'. These ideas of sentience, relishing in the experience of glamour and visibility, and 'letting go' are emphasised by Sarah as key to a successful burlesque performance:

I was watching America's Next Top Model the other day, one of their challenges was to perform a sexy 'burlesque' style dance. They had Dita von Teese feature in the piece too. It was quite amusing to see these girls trying to dance in a 'burlesque' manner, not so much because of their body type but because they all looked incredibly awkward whilst trying to do it. There was no 'just let go and enjoy it' element. I think that's what makes burlesque so incredibly sexy – it's a complete shedding of your inhibitions, you adopt a new character almost, take a stage name (Sarah, pre-photo-session conversation).

Thus, whilst Sarah had a specific set of codes borrowed from burlesque artists and the series '... Next Top Model', she got into her character, with whom she shared

a common subjectivity. During her photo session and photo review, she favoured poses that emphasised her curves and sexiness, but also self-love and playfulness. With regards to the latter element, she favoured pictures in her photo review where, as she puts it, she is 'caught in the middle of a laugh' where her 'smile goes all the way up to [her] eyes', or where she is depicted as falsely 'coy', or 'cheeky'. She selected images that were especially pleasing to her from a photographic/modelling perspective, but, also, translated her having a good experience and 'not trying too hard' to pose. She also selected an image where she displayed a more 'stern' look, to further emphasise her multifaceted-ness and versatility.



Figure 8 Sarah, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 9 Sarah, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.6. Michaela

I had known Michaela as a new friend for a few months before discussing this research project with her. When I did, she immediately offered her participation and indicated feeling strongly about the issue of body diversity of female representation in the marketplace. By taking part in this project, Michaela wanted to make a statement about the beauty and attractiveness of fuller-figured women. She wanted to fill a gap where fuller-figured women are too rarely represented in an attractive manner.

[W]hat I wanted to do is... When I grew up, all I wanted was a role model in glamour magazines a little bit bigger. It's what I always was after and what I was looking for. So, I picked something which is quite 'raw', 'raunchy sexy' because of course, what I wanted to do after is look at the shoot and go: 'why can something like that not be in a magazine'... because I think so many girls growing up have a really difficult time with that. (Michaela, group review)

Part of her concern was that, whenever fuller-figured women are involved in positive representations, there has to be an association with humour. Whilst she indicates liking the cutesy/ modest style associated with fuller-figured models, as well as the tongue in cheek 'pin-up style' that is increasingly associated with the representation of larger women (partly thanks to burlesque revival), she deplores the fact that fuller-figured women are rarely represented in the same 'full-on sexy' way as more traditional models; as if they need an additional support or prop to look as attractive.

[F]or the main shoot I would love to go with the same feel as the Italian Vogue 'Belle Vere' shoot. (...) What I particularly like about the whole shoot is that it is an editorial shoot and that the pictures have not been adjusted to bigger models – what I mean with that is that bigger girls often have a certain type of shoot – it is combined with humour, like the pin-up style. The combination of humour and bigger girls seems to be more accepted in the advertising and fashion world, but it is very rare to see bigger girls in very sexy and 'moody' poses and expressions which seem to be staple poses for regular models.

(...)

This is really what I would have liked when I was younger... Not humour...

Because with a pin-up... I like to look at pin-ups, they are brilliant... what I would have needed is something which is a bit more 'Oh she's not humorous, and therefore it is a good picture. It is a nice picture blatantly. What you see is what you get, and it's exactly as attractive as a slim girl'. For me it would be cheating to use pin-up [humour]... (Michaela, pre-photo-shoot conversation)

Michaela specifically wanted to take this opportunity to make a bold statement about fuller-figured women's unsung ability to look just as attractive as their more slender counterparts given the same treatment. Thus, her photo session was widely pre-planned and used 'bold codes', such as the sultry pout, bold makeup and hair, use of lingerie, and poses that would place her bust and curves in prominence and suggest 'sexual availability'. As she puts it:

I think I wanted it over the top, a bit cheesy, maybe not so much cheesy but I was hoping, literally, to get a picture with a pouty mouth, you know quite like 'this is how thin models are photographed'. (Michaela, group review)

She also asked for specific angles and framing that are rarely seen with fuller-figured models:

I love the picture that is shot from behind and I would love to re-create it, as pictures where the face is not the most prominent feature in the picture are rarely seen with plus-size models. (Michaela, pre-photo-session blog)

In our conversation, Michaela pointed out that 'the bottom' is generally an area of self-critique for women because of the idealisation of a very narrow type of 'buttocks'. Prior to the Vogue 'Belle Vere' photo series, she had rarely seen fuller-figured 'buttocks' in photos, let alone ones that are framed to be aesthetically pleasing. Michaela is quite assertive about her hourglass figure and was willing to undertake the challenge to have a photo taken from behind. She seemed pleased with the resulting photos, as well as the overall portrait series. Michaela also opted for Photoshop retouching to further associate her portraits with those found in magazines:

If I really want to do this plus-size versus slim girls, I want to have a fair chance...

I want to use the same modes. The slim girls would go with Photoshop, wouldn't they? So yes! (laughs) I don't want to have love handles taken out, I just want to make sure it is an even field (Michaela, pre-photo-shoot conversation).

Whilst the photo session was pre-scripted, Michaela did try different poses 'learned' through years of being exposed to fashion magazines and imagery. As a fan of fashion, as well as America's Next Top Model and Britain's Next Top Model, she was highly literate about the suggestive power of the poses and facial expressions used, which made her very successful at creating her intended image. She also had another version of her portrait done; a more candid one, where she was smiling and improvising, playing with a pink flamingo found in the photographer's studio. This was intended as being more revealing of Michaela's inner character, who is a fun-loving, beaming person. Other valued personal qualities brought up by Michaela during the conversation were professionalism, care (including for the self and others), as well as empathy.



Figure 10 Michaela, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 12 Michaela, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 11 Michaela, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.7. Linda

Linda¹⁸ had been introduced to me by a relative in Montreal. She was interested in some of my previous work as she indicated relating to it, and immediately agreed to participate when asked. Linda has a full-time job, and is also a sculptor. She is deeply invested in her art, and sees it as a means to reflect on the self.

I see the relation [in my art work], toughness, the need for it to look tough, but in fact, it is excessively fragile because it is dirt... you know, the patina that coats it, it's a bronze patina, so it looks like bronze, but it... it takes a knock and it breaks... a knock and it breaks, you know. And rock... I sculpt rock, and rock is hard, but it is very fragile. Until you have finished sculpting it, the piece can break... You hit a vein and the rock breaks. So it looks tough but it is very fragile, you know. And I see it in what I do, I don't think about it but it is always there. There is always this relation of fragility and toughness... It's normal, it's me. It's me who is in it, it's my energy... (Linda, pre-photo-session conversation)

This duality between fragility and toughness is really pervasive in Linda's discourse. She sees her sculpture as something that looks tough, but that is in fact very fragile, sensitive and vulnerable to assault. Linda speaks of the outward self she had put forward for years as a mask, whereas she has now come to see and accept herself as more sensitive. With time, she has decided to be more assertive of her human sensitivity.

Linda contrasts her 'authentic self' – a sensitive person, with passions and human characteristics – with the 'mask' of the 'tough one'. She discusses the masks used as a means to fit in: to camouflage or get rid of her difference. As a lesbian and fuller-figured individual, she has had to come to terms with that difference, and drop the masks of conformity to actually enjoy being herself:

I was playing the tough one, I played the tough one... But today I would say ... I don't need this anymore. But for a long time I played the tough one especially so that no one could see my sensitive side.

¹⁸ Linda's account was initially in French and has been translated by me in a very 'literal' manner in order to stay close to the words and expressions used.

You get to an age where you tell yourself, look, I'm not going to spend my life on diets, I'm not going to spend my life depriving myself because I have 'love handles' (rondeurs) because... socially some people have problems seeing the difference. And the fact of being homosexual, of being a lesbian, I had to confront this fact too... difference.

We all have masks, but time comes when masks have to be dropped, you know. They were helpful in many ways, for various reasons, but when you progress in age, you progress and at some point, these masks need to go (...) it seems like you don't fancy these masks anymore, you fancy being who you are... Just being.

Thus, when asked how she wanted to be portrayed, she emphasised the importance of being represented in her real-life setting. For Linda, the idea of being portrayed as she is, in her 'natural' setting was akin to an 'authentic portrayal': one that she contrasts with wearing a 'tough' mask:

It can be [with sculptures, in the studio], it can be outside... life, normal life... I can be walking on the land, that's life, you know. Some moments I am in the studio, other moments I am outdoors, sometimes I am with my girlfriend (...)

I would like the world to see me... I would like to be seen... You know, when I tell you I am not uncomfortable that you come to my home... I am well at ease, because this is who I am. It seems like today, with experience, with age, I no longer need... approval... and I let people judge for themselves. I am not telling you that it is perfect everywhere...

Consequently, Linda's portrayal had no script at all. Linda, who insisted on having the photo session take place during the interview (after an initial hour and a half of conversation), did not care about putting on something special for the photo session, because, as she pointed out, she wanted to be represented just as she is in her home and workshop environment.

Linda selected photos, not so much based on their flattering criteria on her

physical appearance, but rather, based on the inner states they appeared to convey. She selected images that 'represent [her] soul, and not the exterior'. She chose an image with her partner because, to her, it showed that 'beyond the body, there is love'. She had a propensity towards images that conveyed her passion for art, nature, and deep affection for her loved ones.

Overall, Linda presented herself as someone that has been building a tough shell, but who is inherently sensitive and fragile. Learning to present herself as more sensitive (as she 'really' is inside) was part of a personal journey, and was something that she wanted to put across in her photo session. She wanted to emphasise her inner states and traits, such as love, passion and sensitivity. Linda also came across as someone very caring, committed (by donating the proceeds from her art to good causes, for instance) and down to earth, being able to appreciate life's pleasures such as time spent creating, the outdoors, her pets, and the texture of things. She also speaks in length about the importance of health and fitness to her and her partner.



Figure 13 Linda and her life partner, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 14 Linda, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 15 Linda, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.8. José

I was delighted when José¹⁹, a member of my extended family, agreed to take part in this project. Though I have always been impressed by her assertiveness and commitment, I learned much more about her during our work together; the project enabled us to get closer to each other, despite the geographical distance that now separates us.

During our conversations, aside from telling me about her history with size and her feelings about representation, she discussed her love of style, bold shapes and colours. She also talked about her admiration for the quirky and beautiful, found in the work of artists such as Diane Dufresne, or in the imagery of Cirque du Soleil.

José describes herself as visually inclined, and discusses how her hobby as a painter enhances her aesthetic awareness and visual-spatial processing skills. She also enjoys design and fashion (including runway fashion and magazines) as a source of aesthetic pleasure, although she feels somewhat limited by the clothes on offer. As a young girl, she learned how to sew, which enabled her to distinguish herself despite the lack of options available in shops.

She, as well, discussed at length her love of improvisation and involvement in groups of 'improv dance' and 'improv painting'. She loves the creative experience, and the context stimulates and challenges her.

For me art is not about pretention (...) It's pleasure... it's applying colour... it's aesthetic... it's not so much about deep research. But after, you ask yourself: 'Does it look like me?', 'What looks like me in there?' (José, conversation)

For José, making art (or dancing) is about pleasure and expression, and is also a way to retrospectively reflect on the self; to understand the self. Similarly, whilst she had prepared a lot of meaningful props for the portraiture – things she had around her house that she particularly liked such as paintings, a vintage suitcase, jewellery, colourful scarves and an angel statue – her photo session was meant to be improvised.

¹⁹ José's account was initially in French and has been translated by me in a very 'literal' manner in order to stay close to the words and expressions used.

José saw the portrait as an opportunity for aesthetic pleasure, expression and play. To do so, she used different objects she either found meaningful (reflecting her sensitive nature, her love of adventure and fancifulness/creativity) or aesthetically pleasing, including some of her artwork.

José is a very active woman – socially, physically, intellectually and creatively. As a general rule, she engages in activities that bring her pleasure and that she also finds enriching, contributing to the enjoyment of life rather than achieving a certain look or performance:

I cycle, to enjoy the ride;

I ski, to replenish myself with fresh air, (to ascend the mountain, to contemplate the distance, the horizon, to feel the wind);

I swim, to be rocked by the water;

I dance, to change, to evolve, to move beyond the daily grind;

I sew, to distinguish myself;

I travel, to enrich myself;

I cook, to share good time with friends;

I paint, to relish in the colours (obviously!);

I read, for happiness... reading requires tranquillity and is associated with happiness for me;

I garden, to enjoy the colourful blooming. I also enjoy making the most out of limited space;

I cultivate friendships, to enjoy the warmth... and we need it with the cold weather in Quebec!

(José, conversation)

When asked about a positive depiction of fuller-figuredness, José also came up with a very surprising positive image: she relates to the image of the hippos in tutus (such as those of Disney's film *Fantasia*), who, despite their larger figures, look very graceful, agile and sympathetic. Though the idea of a hippo is not necessarily thought of as representing beauty, the image of the hippo in a tutu can certainly be seen as beautiful. José compares this image favourably (in aesthetic terms but perhaps not so much in health terms) to the body resulting from weight loss, which has lost its volume, its fullness, and, not unlike the 'empty potato sack' she uses as an analogy, a bit of its

allure. As she further explains:

When we lose a lot of weight, we give ourselves chances health-wise. But what about in terms of aesthetics??? Empty skin is not as beautiful, drooping flesh is generally less beautiful than 'roundness'. So that's where the full or empty [potato] sack comes from. A person who has lost a significant amount of weight generally looks better dressed up!! (José, discussion on profile)

José is assertive and proud of both her personality and image. In our conversation, she rightfully portrays herself as outgoing, active, caring (for the self and others), daring, romantic, passionate, creative, playful and fun-loving; yet professional, resourceful, committed and involved. These are also facets that come across successfully in her improvised photo session.



Figure 16 José, photographed by Alice Deuchar



Figure 17 José, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.3.9. Elizabeth

Alice, the photographer, is the one to thank for the involvement of Elizabeth in this project. Alice had previously met Elizabeth through circles of friends. She felt Elizabeth would be great because of her positivity, as well as the fact that she is a dance instructor and dancer. When Elizabeth and I got in touch over the phone, she mentioned that she had lost quite a significant amount of weight, but that she was still nonetheless interested in discussing her participation in the project since she still associated herself as larger than the norm. I have to admit feeling reluctant upon hearing this news because I had a tendency, at the time, to focus on alternative/celebratory meanings of fuller-figuredness. She still considered herself as 'overweight' (and though not very large at all in my perspective as a researcher, she could be seen as larger than the slender norm, and thus fitting recruitment criteria). What I found particularly interesting is that Elizabeth really cared about the improvement of the representation of fuller-figured individuals and confirmed her interest in participating in this project because of what it meant to her:

I really feel deeply for what you're doing because what you are doing is kind of reinstating people's absolute core being as beautiful, able, acceptable, sexy, confident, and encouraging that, it's lovely... (Elizabeth, conversation)

In our conversations, Elizabeth emphasised the importance of grace (dignity) and legitimacy of people of all walks of life. With sorrow, she explained her belief that people's self-confidence is broken early on by the way they are socialised and that they are brought up to deny their 'real selves'. She hopes for people to be able to find self-love and is very sensitive to the challenges faced by those who are made to feel inadequate by society and marketplace imagery, such as many fuller-figured individuals.

Annie (A): What elements would you want to put across? What do you want people to get from the picture?

Elizabeth (E): That it's okay to be who you are basically (...) if I'm dancing in a photograph, there's that sense of loving myself... it's been a long time coming but it's there.

You asked how would I wish to be viewed, and I wrote down a couple of things that just sort of flowed and would like to be viewed 'as is', I'd like to be viewed as active and I'd like to be viewed as attractive and elegant. I also want to be viewed as alive and enjoying life which is actually what I do and much more so since that pain has receded to a degree through losing the weight and I'm feeling better. (Elizabeth, conversation)

Though she refers to her weight loss here, there is a clear sense in Elizabeth's accounts that the important characteristics such as feeling alive, enjoying life, being attractive and elegant are not necessarily bound to weight and size, but, rather, to self-awareness, self-nurturing and self-love.

Unlike other participants who were particularly embracing the idea of a self-portrait, Elizabeth, who discussed a past of self-loathing, was not immediately comfortable with the idea. Thus the concept of a photo session came as a bit of a challenge to her, but one that she chose to embrace willingly, partly to help me in the project. As she points out, her participation would be eased by the fact of being in control of the process (engaging in an activity where she feels comfortable) and of being surrounded by people she trusts. Dancing is a quintessential part of Elizabeth's life:

I've liked dancing since I was a child... since I could move I've danced. I've always danced, always. (...) I start dancing and I would forget about [being bigger] because of it, I go into the music, I go into the movement, it becomes a complete irrelevance, a complete irrelevance. It's just when it didn't matter, it didn't matter whether I was skinny, tiny, big, fat, nothing... It didn't matter, I would just dance... I know, I don't know Annie, for somebody who is afraid of being seen... I just find it in a sense, it's contradictory but that's the fact... That once I start to dance that's it! It's like a takeover with the music it's just... the body becomes an interpretation for the music and it's just wonderful. I love it...

A: How do you feel about your body when you dance?

E: I love it, I love it, yeah I'm very in it, very present to it... feeling how it moves and aware of it even... I've just finished doing a neuroscience course (...) and

getting even more present to the internal aspect and watching it as it moves into the music and the rhythm (...) I'm not there, the music hits the skin, it hits the receptors, transfers to my brain, my brain just does what it wants to, and it's an absolute freedom... I suppose it is the freest I ever get... (Elizabeth, conversation)

Thus, Elizabeth speaks of the well-being and freedom she experiences when she dances, unencumbered by her more critical self. She also speaks of dancing as a highly sensual experience, and one that makes her feel attractive, elegant, and keeps her fit and healthy. She wanted her portrait to feature her body/self in connection, in movement, in the flow of the music and the moment. Her portrait was thus not scripted; quite the opposite. Aside from a purple scarf that she particularly loved, she picked clothes on the day; ones that she would feel comfortable in and that would allow her to move freely. She chose her front garden as a matter of convenience and comfort, and as a means to assert her love of flowers and trees.

When selecting her photos, Elizabeth favoured those that reflected a certain grace and sensuality in movement; connection, with herself and the environment, a certain intensity and expression of self-love.



Figure 18 Elizabeth, photographed by Alice Deuchar

6.4 'Dirty little secrets' / Participants' negative feelings

As part of their accounts and in the context of the photo preparation, photo shoots and personal and group photo review sessions, participants have dominantly emphasised positive meanings about their selves and bodies. This could be due to the fact that they were selected as women who appeared, to me, to be at peace with themselves, but also, as a result of the rather celebratory tone that I had adopted as a researcher at the onset of the project. However, it would be wrong to suggest that participants' views of their selves and bodies, or on fuller-figuredness more generally, were entirely 'lovey-dovey' and celebratory. Extending the breadth of possible meanings, by acknowledging not only the positive but also, at times, the more ambiguous and negative meanings, provided more insights for improvement and discursive options for individuals to adopt. Thus, whilst I still can't help cherishing the hope of people adopting discourses that are embracing of their selves and bodies, I see the value and potential of exposing this extended scope of meanings, and investigating their socio-cultural origins (both for the sake of understanding and well-being).

For instance, Louise wrote this well-articulated passage in her blog, which I found, at times, discomfiting, and heart-wrenching at most, given that I was working under the assumption that Louise was very assertive about her looks:

It's a dirty little secret, admitting that you are fat. It's a bit like admitting you are an alcoholic, or that you are addicted to gambling or porn. It's one of those things that you pretend not to notice. Polite society will grant you a blind eye. As long as you don't make a fuss that is. I pretend that I have an hourglass figure. And in reality I do. I tell myself that I am in proportion. Which I am. A bloody big hourglass with lots of wobbly bits. I don't really like looking in the mirror. My face is okay, even pretty sometimes.

The mirror is a practical necessity for my hair though. I have big hair (like I said before, I am in proportion) and it usually needs some attention in the morning! For most of my day, my body just does its thing. I do, I go, I get on with whatever it is I have to. I kind of forget what my body looks like. It is a functional thing. Because I don't really use the mirror that often, I sometimes get a horrid shock when I see my reflection in a window or in one of those full length changing room mirrors. It occurred to me a while ago after catching my reflection that I

look like one of those fat people that they secretly film for the news when they are reporting about obesity.

I am quite sensitive about my weight. I asked a friend to describe my physical body in 5 words, and they declined saying that whatever they said would upset me. The words I'd pick are: big, tall, hairy, tattooed and Rubenesque. I kid myself that describing myself as 'Rubenesque' makes me classical and artistic, and not fat! I joke that I am 'well-upholstered' and 'built for comfort, not speed'. Ha ha, funny fat girl! (Louise, blog)

In this passage, which was reproduced upon the participant's request/approval, Louise emphasises the negative feelings she experiences when thinking about being a larger woman. Though this is not something she thinks about all the time – and perhaps tries to avoid thinking about by restricting her use of mirrors to the necessity, by redirecting her focus on more appreciated facial traits or sustaining the belief that she has a (classically adequate) hourglass figure – her body size is something that she is sensitive about, and that can be associated with a feeling of shame.

This feeling of shame and inadequacy (though not constant) was also picked up in many other participants' discourses. In a few cases, participants were using the rhetoric of emotional coping and addiction to justify their size; discussing use of food as a means to cope with a variety of emotions, or a propensity towards food as something akin to an addiction (and a visible one, to add to the grief). However, some accounts were more assertive of this 'love of food' and were discussing this as a form of hedonism, joie de vivre or balance that was in direct contrast with the rhetoric of pathology.

Importantly, discussing the feeling of shame and inadequacy experienced as larger women was always positioned in parallel with the belief that this feeling is the outcome of cultural conditioning, especially via the idealisation of slender women in visual culture and society. It was discussed as being further exacerbated by the limited resources accessible to contradict this negative view of larger women, and to help express themselves positively.

The fact that this feeling is seen as a social construction by the participants nonetheless suggests that there are alternative discourses they can adopt to

understand the self. Michaela, for instance, highlighted how the use of different words have distinct implications on her self-understanding and level of appreciation. For instance, she indicated:

Words like fat and obese make me feel like I have failed or I should feel ashamed of looking the way I do. They make me feel guilty that I have not 'achieved' being thin. (Michaela, blog)

Conversely, she points out:

I see myself as a very feminine, curvaceous, voluptuous girl/woman (depends on the day and circumstance). I like to use those expressions as they have a positive note to them. They somehow 'allow' me to be the way I am without a guilty conscious – the opposite, I can be proud of who I am and the way I look. (Michaela, blog)

Other 'negative' perceptions about 'fuller-figuredness' could also be extrapolated from participants' discussions, on and off the record, about not liking certain pictures because it made them look fat, wanting to reframe photos to discard body sections seen as 'problematic', using corsets or loose clothing to alter or hide the body shape, etc. More 'negative' understandings of fuller-figuredness emerged as participants discussed ongoing attempts at weight loss during the project, or after the data collection phase, despite advocating for size acceptance and health in different sizes. I, out of all participants in this research, have also been subject to this sort of tension, especially as I have experienced being pregnant and becoming a new mother throughout the course of this research. I believe this personal experience of trying to cope with dramatic body changes and medical pressure was an important eye-opener for me as a feminist researcher, if only because it reminded me how difficult size acceptance can be outside of a 'political' academic mindset. It confronted me with the fact that identity tensions may arise for some of the most adamant proponents of size acceptance, even at the most unexpected times:

Though I felt comfortable, or at least confident, in reclaiming my previous fuller-figured silhouette, experiencing physical changes through pregnancy brought about new insecurities about my appearance. This emphasised how, to me, the notion of stability of weight (more so than weight itself) was an important factor

in sustaining a long-earned sentiment of self-acceptance. My perspective also changed through and after pregnancy; whereas notions such as appearance took a back seat, if albeit temporarily, whilst I was settling into my new identity as a mother. Insecurities often arose afterwards about the speed of getting back to my initial body identity (as if my current heavier new mother body is not my permanent identity), pointing to the pervasiveness of this idea that the core self is not necessarily skinny, but at least stable. (Annie)

In antenatal classes, and in contact with the National Health Service's (NHS) midwives, emphasis was put on a normal curve of weight gain; whereas a derogation from this rule was viewed as potentially harmful to baby. In this sense, whilst I am aware that medical research supporting alternative positions exists, I felt that my body weight was somehow hindering my moral position as an expectant mother and would have a physical impact on the destiny of my child and that of my future role as a mother. Furthermore, much emphasis was put on the argument of weight loss to encourage breastfeeding (whereas, as I found out from experience and anxious online searches, breastfeeding can also hinder weight loss). Though I understand the importance of breastfeeding, I found it shocking to harness expectant and new mothers' body anxieties for that purpose. Anxieties about body weight also emerged with my newborn baby. From the moment he was born, weight became an important bio-numeric indicator for health (on which my success was judged as a new mother). Weighing baby became a regular practice, and despite my own position (which I would have hoped provided me a form of immunity) fed into this idea of a right weight being a sign of health and of righteous parenting. Overall, expecting a baby and becoming a parent through the course of this research further sensitised me to the way weight is a pervasive characteristic from the onset of life. It also made me realise that body acceptance is a process that is not only hard-won but one that requires constant rekindling because of the pervasiveness of the dominant discourse and ongoing body changes as part of human existence. (Annie)

6.5. Conclusion

Having addressed the emergence of negative meanings of fuller-figuredness for the participants throughout this project, and in spite of them experiencing tensions brought about by socio-cultural discourses, I would now like to re-emphasise a simple yet fundamental finding that contradicts most of the traditional research accounts positioned as part of the 'war on obesity': the nine fuller-figured participants in this project had the capacity to make, and made, numerous positive associations with their selves, bodies and sizes. These positive attachments, generally on the basis of appearance, health and inner traits, are politically important as they undermine the idea that 'fatness' and 'the fuller-figured identity' can only be read and experienced as a negative construct. Against the odds, in a society that adulates slenderness as a sign of moral righteousness and health, these participants have found ways to exist and represent themselves with a sense of dignity and legitimacy.

7. Interpretation

In the previous chapter, I reported how participants spoke of their selves/bodies and envisioned their self-directed portraiture. This descriptive presentation of the participants was guided by two purposes: (1) to highlight emerging concerns and identity themes that are core to this thesis and (2) to respect participants' boundaries and dignity. I intend on presenting my interpretation of their accounts in a similar cautious vein. On one hand, my interpretation is not 'objective', or 'closed', but rather, it is an attempt at reaching out for plausible ways of making sense of (my reading of) participants' accounts. By adopting a mindset of 'interpretive plausibility' instead of one of 'analytical affirmability' (Wolcott, 1994), I am deliberately steering away from any suggestion that the participating women can be entirely grasped and faithfully represented with theoretical writing. On the other hand, my interpretation is informed with the same care for the dignity and boundaries of the participants. It focuses on the emerging themes of 'beauty', 'health' and 'virtue', that many participants used to make sense of and give value to their identities, and attempts to locate these definitions and ways of understanding the self in a broader cultural context. In doing so, I wish to highlight how forgotten perspectives may challenge existing consumer research theories. This comes with the appreciation of the great differences that exist between participants' accounts/ portraits and stereotypical representations in the marketplace imagery and research. In this regard, the following interpretation departs from traditional ambitions about generalisation: we are not talking about one category, or one type of people defined by their weight and size, but various complex individuals with different tastes, life situations, ideas and self-understandings. This recognition needs to be kept in mind when reading the following interpretation, as it calls upon a mindset of epistemic opening as opposed to one of epistemic closure.

They are all so different, all of the pictures, you know! It's so nice to see that everybody has such a different idea of what, you know, how they want to [be represented]... It just makes me really upset that they always only show one certain facet of how people should be. And you look at this and women want to be portrayed so differently... (agreement in the group) (Michaela, group review)

7.1. Slenderness as a moral achievement

As reminded by Thompson and Hirschman (1995), our Western context has been greatly influenced by Judeo-Christian and Cartesian ethics. Concurrently, '[m]ost people in western societies (...) are engaged in a struggle to control their eating habits to conform to orthodoxies around health, physical attractiveness and notions of the 'virtuous' person' (Lupton, 1996: 4). Several authors using a poststructuralist understanding of the body/identity have discussed how, at the core, matters of health and beauty are generally seen as a reflection of good inner moral traits. As reminded by Joy and Venkatesh:

Preservation of the inner body [referred to as health] is the moral equivalent of the work ethic, that is, he or she (mainly she) who does not have the discipline to take care of the inner body has no moral right to expect to maintain an attractive outer body. This moral principle is turned around in such a way that the person with an aesthetic outer body (with a good shape and appearance) is the moral equivalent of a good person. (1994: 349)

The traditional Judeo-Christian inner qualities of chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness and humility – more generally defined by an ethos of self-control and denial of the embodied self – are seen as core virtues used to shape the idea (and silhouette) of an adequate women. Efficient exertion of this control is thought of as resulting in an optimal healthy body and as making up for a beautiful appearance (Synnott, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Conversely, health and physical beauty stand for the control of the body by the virtues (and rational progresses) of the mind.

In this sense, health reflects virtues: a healthy person is a good person because he/she makes virtuous lifestyle choices guided by self-control and discipline. Moreover, a sound health condition is seen as being reflected in a sound physical appearance, and vice-versa. This is so, even if there is a case for arguing that the means to achieve youthful and slender body ideals can constitute health hazards in themselves.

Thus, appearance reflects virtues, because it is assumed that a good person 'shines', or has enough self-control, and this is reflected in their appearance. As such,

this self-control and discipline, which is thought of as fostering good health, is also thought of as being directly reflected in a 'good', slender appearance according to current conventions.

These three spheres can be seen as interlinked as part of the following equation/conquest for moral adequacy:

'virtues=>health=>slender beauty'

This equation is loosely used in Western society, in the marketplace and at the personal level, to assert moral and physical adequacy. It is also used to problematise deviations from this equation, including 'fatness', which is perceived to be the outcome of unvirtuous and unhealthy self-indulgence.

Whilst orthodoxies of health, physical attractiveness and virtues culminate in the idealisation of a slender physique, it is interesting to see how the participants in this research – who are well embedded in Western society and marketplace culture – diverge from this dominant track, whilst still pursuing and achieving, to a certain extent, a sense of self-adequacy. As will be argued in this chapter, participants still generally value the three realms of the dominant equation, namely 'beauty', 'health' and 'virtues'. However, they do not necessarily stick to the more mainstream definitions of these terms. Instead, as part of their quest for self-adequacy, participants elicit alternative definitions of these terms: 'back roads' (or alternative discourses), sometimes intersecting with the dominant 'highway'. These alternative roads highlight a much broader discursive landscape, as well as different possibilities to seek and achieve, to a certain extent, a feeling of self-adequacy in contemporary Western society.

7.2. The redefinition of beauty: participants' accounts of attractive appearance

Although to different degrees, participants placed importance on beauty and sexiness in the context of the photo session and more generally as part of their self-concepts. Most participants discussed in length their past of self-loathing on the basis of physical appearance, especially emphasising the feeling of inadequacy they experienced as 'chubbier' teenagers trying to assert their identities (namely, via style), or as part of a quest for romantic relationships. They also discussed this feeling of inadequacy (on

the basis of weight and shape, but also through signs of ageing or dissatisfaction with non-compliant body parts) coming back in certain situations (workplace, shopping), with certain individuals or on 'bad days', and the trickling effect this can have on their general feeling of self-worth.

The importance of beauty for most participants was unsurprising considering the social imperative to be beautiful/slender, as part of the female gender ideology. The hegemonic salience of (slender) physical attractiveness is generally internalised at a young age, and fostered by corporations who act as 'key actors in the production and reproduction of beauty ideology' (Johnston & Taylor, 2008) via the promotion of elitist models and emphasis on the consumption of appearance-enhancing products and practices (Hirschman, 1993; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

Several participants – namely Michaela, Sarah, SJ, Laura and I, and to a less significant extent, Elizabeth and José – explicitly aimed to challenge the discourses that 'only skinny is beautiful or sexy', or that 'larger women are ugly or unattractive' by creating a portrait-statement showing that they, as fuller-figured women, could be attractive as well. This, perhaps, further asserts the importance or centrality of beauty in their lives, but also suggests that it is possible to think of oneself as attractive in spite of the pervasiveness of the slender beauty ideology. As such, the extent to which participants are made to feel inadequate beauty-wise according to the dominant slender beauty ideology can be mitigated by the fact that the participants have adopted an 'extended' or 'alternative' definition of physical attractiveness.

Participants value attractive appearance and, with one exception²⁰, want to assert that they too are attractive, which extends the mainstream understanding of what beauty/sexiness is. This can be contrasted with a perspective that beauty/sexiness is not important, (or in the case of Linda, not as important), or a standpoint that beauty/sexiness is important but exclusive to slender individuals.

²⁰ Linda values appearance but does not emphasise this aspect in her self-presentation.

7.2.1. Attractive appearance based on physical features

Certain participants, specifically Michaela, Sarah, Laura, SJ, Linda and I, suggested the use of an extended definition of attractive appearance, which is related to the display of physical traits considered as 'beautiful' in people of various sizes. The latter often encompassed notions of 'beautiful' features by virtue of their similarity to those of women idealised in the visual culture. In this sense, participants often spoke about or brought up pictures of larger size models and personalities, such as Sophie Dahl, Queen Latifah, Marilyn Monroe, Christina Hendricks and Nigella Lawson, who have been described as fitting the contemporary 'cover girl' standards of beauty, though in larger/curvier versions. These females were often used to prove that, when given the same level of care and consideration as slender public figures (for example with clothing, makeup or the more controversial Photoshop process), fuller-figured individuals could be perceived to be just as beautiful physically and were often referred to as examples of what participants would want to achieve in their portraits. As such, the definition of beauty is not tied to a normative size, but, rather, can be seen as associated with special sets of 'cover girl' features.

SJ, Michaela, Sarah, Laura and I expressed a desire to emphasise some more normatively beautiful features (eyes, lips, face, hair with strategic use of makeup and hairstyles), as well as 'assets' such as generous breasts and hips.

Aside from 'pretty features', the idea of having an 'hourglass silhouette' or 'feminine curves' was often used as a means to assert physical attractiveness and as a source of favourable comparison with spindly models promoted by the fashion industry. Thus, a participant's or model's curvy or voluptuous silhouette was often characterised as a source of adequacy by virtue of its association with femaleness, femininity, sexiness and sensuality.

Michaela, SJ, Sarah and Laura (and I, to a lesser extent with my retro bathing suit) chose pieces of garments to accentuate or highlight our cherished curvy silhouettes. Michaela, Sarah and SJ also deliberately opted for codes and postures used in the fashion industry (especially using tricks provided in television shows such as America's Next Top Model or Britain's Next Top Model) to emphasise their 'curviness' and the stylistic value of their portrait.

[Photo 11:] standing up straight my hips jutting out again to create that smooth curve of my waist going in and my hips jutting out, that's what I was trying to go for in that one (Sarah, review conversation)

This previous quote (similar ones can be found in accounts from Michaela and SJ) suggests the importance of curviness for Sarah, but also, the minutiae and level of expertise deployed to emphasise the curves in just the right place in the portraiture. In contrast to this idea of engineering a perfect hourglass silhouette, participants generally spoke of their curves as being more 'natural' for them, or respectful of their 'natural' shape.

This, however, is less true for me as although I consider myself to be fuller-figured, I don't see myself as particularly curvy. Whilst I like to find ways to enhance curviness (including in my portraiture) I personally find the hourglass feminine ideal conveyed by fuller-figured models or retro beauty icons such as Marilyn Monroe – just like any other set form of ideal embodiment – as rather oppressive. Nonetheless, curves were generally referred to by participants as something natural, but, also, pleasing in their 'essence' for being associated with aesthetic and tactile pleasure. Several participants used the argument that curvy (and more voluptuous) silhouettes have been a favourite for classical paintings. For instance, Linda makes a clear bridge between the 'rounder', 'fuller' female body and her 'natural inclination' towards round shapes in her artworks:

And I would say, yes, she was fat, but she was sexy... I always loved roundness, even in my sculpture... you will see, I will show you [some sculptures] later and you will see. I always loved... I create round shapes (...) I see much more sensuality in a curve than in a piece of wood. There is volume... (Linda, conversation)

The 'quintessentially feminine' and sensual characteristic of curves, which is seen as being associated with timeless beauty (seen as under-appreciated in contemporary Western society), stimulates a source of nostalgic attachment by participants for a time when fuller/curvier bodies were valued. All participants, without exception, appreciatively referred to retro beauty icons. The desire to emphasise curves in the photo session often came in tandem with the idea of transposing oneself

in a retro setting, or using retro garments (such as corsets, shaping bathing suits and dresses) that enhanced the cherished hourglass silhouette. For instance, Laura explains:

*Curvy was the way in the 50's so that's another period which inspires me.
(Laura, pre-photo-session email conversation)*

In this quote, Laura suggests a relationship between her sustained fondness for the 1950s, and her vision of this period as being more amenable to – or even more celebrating of – curvy silhouettes with which she associates herself. This type of participant association with retro settings/imagery/icons can be seen as a way to point to the essential adequacy of their silhouette. In a similar way to the ‘Goths’ festival discussed by Goulding and Saren (2009) or the new burlesque subculture studied by Blanchette (2013), Laura, Sarah, SJ, Michaela, Louise and I took the opportunity to create portraits specifically designed to ‘*defy contemporary images of idealized beauty shapes, creat[ing our] own “beauty mystique” [or rather, “beauty nostalgique”] and celebrat[ing our] femininity, which is rooted in a more historical concept of beauty*’ (Goulding & Saren, 2009: 32). As highlighted in my work on new burlesque subcultures (Blanchette, 2013), which builds on Goulding’s emergent typology of nostalgic individuals (2001, 2002, 2003) associating with retro ideals can be seen as a preference, as well as a form of resistance to, the feminine beauty ideals represented in the marketplace.

At a very basic level, several participants exhibited some form of ‘simple’ or ‘vicarious’ nostalgia for a time before their own. Consequently, participants also extended the definition of beauty by alluding to past beauty ideals. However, the appreciation of previous beauty ideals goes beyond the notion of sheer physicality. It also encompasses the notion of codes/attitude as reflected in the icon of the seductive ‘vamp’, ‘femme fatale’, or the ‘happy-go-lucky pin-up’. As such, physical attractiveness can also be seen from an ‘alternative’ perspective to the common definition of beauty/sexiness based on a slender body and a particular set of physical features. An alternative definition of attractive appearance can be based on the idea of adequately staging the body, with viewer-recognised codes of sexiness.

For instance, in Michaela's case, who chose a more 'upfront sexy' depiction, the portraits were seen as a means to establish that fuller-figured women can be just as convincingly sexy and attractive as slender models. To her, in the context of the portrait, a straightforward sexy depiction was about more than just the (extended) notion of physical beauty: it involved the adoption of codes, postures and revealing attires used in the visual culture to depict models as sexually attractive and available. Michaela wanted to appear overtly sexy, without the need for apology, false humility, or the prop of humour; all of which are perceived as more common approaches for fuller-figured models to take, but seen as making for an inferior grade of attractiveness compared to high-fashion models.



Figure 19 Michaela, photographed by Alice Deuchar

Similarly, SJ contended that fuller-figured women (including in burlesque) are often playing on the notion of accessibility, referring to the image of the 'bubbly' or 'flirty goodtime fat girl' (SJ, blog). For instance, she points to the common discourse, that you can be cute, but 'you can't be sexy or untouchable [in the same way as more slender burlesque performers or models are] because you are large'. As a result of this, she decided to devote herself to what she conceptualised as a more elegant, untouchable 'couture' look, as opposed to that of the 'bubbly', sympathetic, funny or sexually-accessible fuller-figured woman. Again, to SJ, just like in the case of Michaela, the codes used in the representation of the 'bubbly' girl are seen as a way to compensate for a potentially inferior level of physical attractiveness.

Some participants, namely Michaela, SJ and Sarah (and I, to a certain extent), favoured much more posed, pre-arranged portraits in which the body was meant to convey specific ideas that would be understood (to be attractive) by an outside viewer. Pre-determined codes were used in order to create different focus on the body, and expressions were used to suggest 'sultry sexiness', 'superiority', 'sauciness' and 'elegance', or to achieve the aesthetic standards of fashion imagery:

Being an avid fan of "...Next Top Model", I had an idea of how to act in front of the camera to make the picture look convincing. I tried to get into my character of Sassy Maroon, and made my eyes at the camera as if I was performing for real. (Sarah, post-photo-session blog post)

Thus, to some extent, Michaela, Sarah and SJ define attractiveness from an outside perspective: in the eyes of the observer. In order to be recognised as attractive, a woman needs to display recognisable codes of attractiveness, and, as such, attractiveness is based on self-awareness in light of social expectations.

7.2.2. Attractive appearance based on the expression of the inner self

Whilst these photos were characterised as attractive by the group of participants, some participants suggested that the extent to which some sitters managed to convey attractiveness is related to what is perceived as a projection of self-confidence, and 'ownership' of their sexuality. Elizabeth, conversely, manifested her feeling of sadness that younger women always feel the need to play the outwardly sexy card. As she points out:

Although there is a blatancy in the younger generation I still get a sense [that] there is a fear, there is a fear that they are not good enough, there is not that consolidation, quiet confidence that 'I am a sexual person, I am attractive...' (Elizabeth, conversation)

Elizabeth contrasts the idea of sexualisation (eliciting sexual desire from the other as opposed to having sexual desire) with the idea of 'being sexual' or affirming oneself as 'sexual' (Willson, 2007), which arguably requires inner self-awareness, more so than social self-awareness.

These more critical accounts led to the second perspective that attractiveness can be seen as emanating from the expression of desirable inner characteristics as opposed to the display of particular codes of attractiveness. Whilst Elizabeth, Louise, Linda, and also Laura, predominantly discuss attractiveness as a connection with the 'inner self', other participants, namely Michaela, SJ, Sarah and I (who all adopted a more pre-scripted approach to the portraits) also saw this connection as playing a great role in what makes an attractive appearance.

Expressing the 'inner self'

Whilst some of the accounts position beauty and attractiveness as a matter of physical appearance, or outer self, others point to these elements as pertaining to the inner self. It is worth emphasising here that, from a constructivist perspective, the self (including its inner and outer components) and its experience can be seen as social constructions shaped by available discourses.

Sarah, who used a repertoire of codes found in burlesque imagery, also put a strong emphasis on the enjoyment of the experience; an enjoyment in itself which was expected to significantly contribute to her attractiveness in the portrait. As she puts it:

I think that ultimately sexiness is more down to attitude than body size or shape. I think a heavier woman with a bright beaming smile and appealing personality would grab more attention than a much slimmer, stereotypically 'beautiful' woman who sits in a corner with a frown and her arms folded. Of course, this is by no means a 'slim-bashing' blog, women of all shapes and sizes can be beautiful if they want to be. Some might think that being sexy means wearing a lot of slap, tight dresses and standing out from the crowd. Attitude speaks louder than lip gloss. (Sarah, pre-photo-session blog)

But bloody hell on Saturday 2nd June [photo session] I looked pretty God damn good. The reason is not because I have a perfect body, but because I felt it inside. The beauty came through my eyes, my smile. (Sarah post-photo-session blog)



Figure 20 Sarah, photographed by Alice Deuchar

Aside from adopting burlesque codified gestures and sexy outfits to project the idea of sexiness, Sarah also sees attractiveness as a matter of attitude and reflection of self-assertiveness. Whilst her account does suggest the importance of the perception of the viewer, more importantly, attractiveness is thought to emanate from the fact of 'being in touch with the self' and 'letting go' of critical self-assessments or hang-ups at a more private level.

This latter idea, which can be framed as assertive inner self-awareness (as opposed to self-critical, or social self-awareness) as a means to project attractiveness, is supported by the accounts of many other participants, specifically Elizabeth, Louise,

Linda, José, and Laura (as well as SJ and Michaela to a lesser extent). Whilst Michaela and SJ (but also Sarah and I to a different degree) wanted to create a staged portrait, other participants seemed to seek the creation of a portraiture that is more happenstance, where the body, or the self, is left to 'express itself' in a 'free' and improvised way. Similarly, Linda, Louise, José, Laura and Elizabeth, to different extents, wanted to show a glimpse of their universe, by involving references to their passions, inner states and love.

Elizabeth – who cringes at the idea of women/girls using internalised codes of sexualisation – sees attractiveness as a matter of 'allow[ing your] sexuality to show'. This implies being aware, and in touch with one's own sexual 'being' and desires:

I think it's a courageous woman who's 18 stone or whatever, who allows her sexuality to show. I remember watching a movie and (...) this lady was a big lady and she was something else, she was gorgeous and she, she knew it... and I would love every person to know that (...) she sat there and (...) there was a guy there that gave her a look and she knew, she knew her own self as attractive... when she was engaging with the guy she was just... and she was just looking at him and she looked away and there with the essence of her being and she just had a black skirt and an ordinary top, that's it. No burlesque, nothing, she was amazingly sexy I thought 'bloody hell, amazing woman!' but you can put somebody in all of that garb and it doesn't work because they haven't got it or they haven't got in touch with it in themselves. (Elizabeth, pre-photo-session discussion)

This idea that attractiveness comes from inner self-awareness and assertion of that inner self is also adopted by Louise, who (like all other participants) discusses her attraction to the new burlesque movement:

Louise: I have seen some bigger girls doing [burlesque] acts that are incredibly sexy and sultry and you are just "WOW!"

SJ: In the same sense that you get with Dita?

Louise: Yeah, yeah! Ageless, flawless, Queen Sheba... "Holy Cow! What do you think? This is amazing!" I'm getting goose bumps just thinking about it... they are... the positivity is the thing... you know, they are confident in their skin, which is really.... Such a breath of fresh air!

In her discussion about her favourite burlesque performances, Louise emphasises how confidence, but also 'ownership', playfulness, creativity and pleasure, are important elements that contribute to beauty and sexiness; as opposed to this idea of just 'looking immaculate'.

The discourse of the participants on 'what makes a sexy representation' echoes that of several women who I met during my previous research in North American burlesque revival communities (Blanchette, 2013). For instance, whilst some performers and spectators valued the beauty, elegance and glamour of classical burlesque emulation, others particularly sought more subversive performances in which performers projected an assertive ownership of their body, including its desires, pleasures and quirky imagination.

In their portraits, several participants were decidedly demonstrating how they were in touch with their desires, sense of fun and embodied imagination:

Sarah, who adopted a burlesque theme, used some traditional codes of elegance and sexiness, but was importantly having fun – 'having a blast' – dancing to retro music and interacting with us on the set; Laura decided to create a fun, 'naughty' portrait in which she indulged in party food, bubbly and cigarettes, all staged in a retro theme – all things that she loves and she sees as part of who she is; José and Louise were playing with meaningful props, 'having a laugh' with us on the set, and letting their imagination take over... thus projecting what they envisioned as an attractive part of themselves; Elizabeth was portrayed dancing, displaying a sense of connection between her body and what she discusses as her 'inner self', projecting emotional intensity and a graceful union with the music; finally, I was in my element, in the water... Though I was struggling to keep my eyes open, I really enjoyed gliding in the water and coordinating my movements with Alice, the photographer. Projecting this actual sense of fun is what made for my favourite portraits.

7.2.3. Attractive appearance and style

The notion of style, which includes demeanour but especially clothing and body decorations, came up as a prevalent element for various participants, especially as a means of developing an attractive appearance and expressing one's sense of self – even if the latter can be seen as a social construction. This can be linked to participants' envisioning of what is perceived as a positive physical appearance, as well as giving us more detail about how they envision the role of appearance as part of identity.

As previously mentioned, several participants entertain a close connection with the field of arts, crafts, design or fashion, and state that they have developed a strong aesthetic sensibility – which could be a reason why style, as an aesthetic-creative medium, is important.

I adore fashion and studied textiles 'A' level and often dreamt of being a designer. My degree is also in design where I concentrated on 3D Designer maker so I have a strong eye for shapes and colours. The clothes I want to wear are just not available to me. I feel that within the plus-size industry there is a real gap for a certain style. (SJ, blog)

I like reading magazines and looking at the latest fashion – it is a bit like going to an art exhibition. (Michaela, blog)

Similarly to Tischner's larger participants, who '*constituted themselves as interested in fashion and appearance, but regulated and hampered by the fashion and retail industry*' (2013: 73), participants emphasised their interest in fashion, as well as highlighting the limitation to their ability to create exactly the look that they want, given the reduced 'pool of resources' (Louise, blog) to draw from. However, whilst Tischner especially emphasised the limitations for the participants (perhaps because, at a larger size, their struggle is even greater to find clothes that fit), my participants emphasised, at length, the pleasure and meaningfulness of developing a style of their own. Style was of special importance to José, Louise, SJ, Laura, Michaela and me (and for Elizabeth, but to a lesser extent).

Style and social adequacy

For some of the participants, style has been discussed as a means to fit in with social norms of 'good taste' and appropriateness. As Michaela puts it:

A lot of my confidence and how I feel has to do with how other people see me. I think this is also a reason why I like to make an effort. (Michaela, pre-photo-session conversation)

Participants sometimes spoke of clothing as something that is or should be selected to be age-, class-, but also body-appropriate for themselves or others. For instance, Elizabeth discussed her feeling of having to hide with 'elegant' but 'camouflaging' clothes when heavier, as opposed to now that she has lost weight and feels more socially accepted in revealing more of her body.

When I was 13 stone I dressed in an elegant manner, and also in clothing that would hide... there was some sort of aspect of hiding (...) Normally, you see, I would have something loose, I'd be wearing something loose so that it would come mid-thigh and flowy and it would be pretty but there would be a reason for it, would be to hide and I noticed that in the last week it's off. I'm not wearing those things and then walking with more confidence and getting the clothes that I haven't had on in a while. (Elizabeth, conversation)

This idea of hiding suggests that style is being used as a means to respect social conventions where larger people should avoid revealing their bodies (as they are expected to feel ashamed of themselves). Similarly, the idea that women need to be vigilant about norms of good taste, especially due to their sizes, came up with a few participants. SJ and José disapprovingly discussed the idea that some women or younger girls 'don't dress for their sizes', and 'let their love handles hang out in an ungracious manner'. However, participants were divided on the idea that people need to conform to pre-established norms of good taste or style, and that clothes selection should be made according to a specific understanding of what fits certain bodies. For instance, Linda, Michaela, Louise and I, for instance, applaud the confidence of larger women who dare to wear what they want, despite what is expected of them by the marketplace and society.

The idea of adopting an appropriate style implies the notion of social self-awareness (including awareness of fashion codes and conventions), as well as a form of body-appearance awareness. Learning to find clothes that project the right idea in the public eye whilst working in harmony with the body was discussed as an important form of know-how to be developed. Sarah, who developed a taste for maxi dresses as a means to camouflage her size, has now relinquished the use of this piece of garment because it is 'just wrong' for her shape. Like other participants, following the cues of Nigella and other alternative style sources celebrating curves (such as Gok Wan), she now prefers the use of clothing that particularly enhances her hourglass silhouette. Whilst José highlighted the importance of finding clothes that fit and work for the body (emphasising the importance of high-quality fabric that gives structure to the body), she also suggested that choices should not be limited to black shirts, but, rather, should encompass colours and attractive patterns that suit the wearer's personality. Furthermore, José emphasised her belief that being more assertive in terms of one's own style (providing that it respects basic principles of elegance) is an asset that allows her to make wiser choices, and make the most of what is available in terms of style offering.

The importance of elegance was often brought up by participants. The topic seems to imply a sense of refinement in taste and know-how that creates harmony between a piece of garment, and a wearer's body and personality (which can be contrasted with the idea of a model as a hanger). Importantly, this idea of elegance implies an important dose of self-care:

Confidence in myself and in my appearance definitely grew over time. I have days when I feel prettier than other times. I think it has a lot to do with taking care about my appearance. As a rule I try to always make sure I wear clothes that I like and feel comfortable in – I always pick my clothes in the morning to make sure they fit my current mood. Over the years I have realised that the most important thing for my figure is a good fit – fashion and colour come second. I quite like vintage inspired cuts as I feel they fit my figure well. Cuts were made to support a feminine figure and I like that – it fits my personality and also make me appear in proportion. I am quite a 'girl' and I like to express this also with my clothes. I love dresses – they make me feel confident. I like

strong colours they make me happy – I also like a bit of a fashion twist – sometimes anyway. (Michaela, pre-photo-session blog)

Michaela, José, Laura and SJ were adamant about the importance of care. This can be contrasted with what they discussed as a problematic lack of care in the representation of larger individuals, often depicted as ‘scruffy’, ‘dishevelled’ or ‘old fashioned’ in marketplace imagery. Michaela also pointed out the tendency of celebrity magazines to emphasise the grotesqueness of celebrity weight gain by picking and delving upon the least flattering, more ‘sloppy’ photos:

If you look at those trash magazines... I am not buying them (...) you see on the front cover... this was 10 months ago and she just had her child and she looked horrendous... just let her get on with it! Let her go to the supermarket and be a normal person! Just get over it! It really does annoy me a lot... I guess it's a part of celebrity culture... It doesn't need to be... Women change over time, and so do men. There's all sorts of reasons... you don't have to be sloppy about it! It's awful to imply that if you have an extra 40 kilos, you are sloppy, you don't care... (Michaela, pre-photo-session conversation)

Style and the ‘inner’ self

Participants used style to project an ‘adequate’ physical appearance, to the extent that it fits with social expectations. However, in most of these participants’ cases, this style also needed to be created in conjunction with an awareness and assertiveness of who ‘really’ is inside.

Louise discussed how, in the past, she would wear baggy t-shirts with the idea that they would be more flattering by detracting attention from her body. She eventually gave up the idea in order to pursue her own more daring, creative and playful personal sense of style. This brings me to point out how style is not just a means to achieve adequacy with social norms (which requires social self-awareness), but also a privileged means of assertion and expression of the self (which requires inner self-awareness).

I don't want to look like everyone else. But like everyone else, I have very particular tastes and have a very specific idea of what I want to look like. I have

always been lucky in not caring what other people think of my clothes. If I like it, that's it. If you don't like it, that's fine because I am wearing it not you! Ha!
(Louise, blog)

I have plans for more [tattoos]. It feels as if I already have them. They are waiting under my skin to be coloured in. I feel more like myself than I ever did without them. I cannot imagine myself without them. They are such a massive part of my being. I adore being tattooed. I love the colours of my skin. (Louise, blog)



Figure 21 Louise, photographed by Alice Deuchar

From my theoretical perspective, style is seen as a social construction, no matter how seemingly alternative or idiosyncratic. However, from an emic perspective, Louise's accounts suggests that the notion of 'good' appearance is less about conforming to a certain expected look, but more about something that comes from within; something she wants to express. This is further asserted in her discussion of tattoos, where the style is seen as coming from within, 'waiting under [her] skin to be coloured in'.

For Louise, the irrelevance of the (mainstream) public is further asserted by the fact that she constructs her style deliberately using art history/religious iconographic codes in her body art, that are now obscure to anyone else but those in the know.

I like that there is a code. The tattoos aren't just amazing pieces of art in their own right, but they say something else if you know what you are looking at. (Louise, blog)

In this sense, Louise positions her body/self as an entity that is not necessarily there to be understood by the public, but that can only be appropriately understood when looking beyond the sheer aesthetic, and in the eyes of connoisseurs.

Similar to Arsel and Thompson's (2011) discussion of adopters of the indie consumption ethos who reportedly shape their style according to their 'genuine' tastes instead of adopting a pre-packaged (hipster) look, Louise feels like she is doing her

own thing – following her love and desires - instead of seeking a look that is ‘cool’ in the eyes of others. As with members of counter-cultures discussed by Arsel and Thompson, Louise seems to pursue ‘ideals of authenticity, freedom from institutional constraints, autonomous self-expressiveness and rewarding communal affiliations’ (2011: 794) (Louise is highly involved in the indie community in her local vicinity). She builds her style following what she terms as a ‘visceral’, long-time passion for flowers, colours, retro and kitsch. A strong parallel can be made between Louise – who uses colours, flowers and retro-kitsch elements that infuse her life with the colourful *joie de vivre* of yesteryear – and the informant Valerie who adopts a ‘beach style’ in Murray (2002)’s article about the use of fashion discourses:

The beach dimension of Valerie’s style is autotelic in that the spontaneous intrinsic enjoyment she feels when experiencing beach life is an end in itself. (Murray, 2002)

I wear a flower in my hair because I love wearing flowers in my hair... I feel undressed without one, it’s just something I have been doing for so long.... it’s funny in some of the places I have worked some people have said “oh you’re not wearing a flower today” so I say “all right I think I’ll wear one next time” and you know we make it kind of the game... so I had a rose in or a lily... Yes, so I wear them because I love wearing flowers in my hair. It really did make me happy... absurdly happy! My glasses... because I love the 50s and these are genuine 1950s glasses and I was gob smacked to find them [and that] they fit me. (Louise, pre-photo-session conversation)

I adore musicals. The songs, the dancing, the costumes, the locations, the romance! I will readily admit to preferring the films that have happy endings! (...) The costumes can be mouth-watering in their design and colour. I get an extra big smile on my face when the credits for a film go up and I see that the costumes (or even better, ‘gowns by’) someone with a single name, e.g. Adrian. I picture myself in those outfits, and it feels good. (Louise, blog)

Louise’s style, but also José’s, SJ’s and Laura’s respective love of shapes, patterns, textures, colours and vintage accessories, can be seen as ‘autotelic’, and, as such, experienced as ‘intrinsically rewarding’ (Thompson, 1997). Again, similarly to

Murray's aforementioned informant, style, for these participants, 'is value expressive and liberating, provid[es] a sense of continuity and connection to valued relationships and activities' (and I would add to this, time periods, and inspirational individuals).

Arts philosopher Freeland (2010) highlights our particular ability, as humans, 'to enjoy the aesthetic dimensions of things we do and interact with – whether singing lullabies to children, chanting or dancing in ritual worship of the gods, decorating our bodies, homes and tools, or making what Western culture has come to call fine art' (2010: 295). Building upon the work of Dissanayeke (2000), she indicates how art (which can include any form of artistic manifestations including body decoration and style) enables life and things to be 'made special'. As clear from the accounts of participants, style can be seen as a way for them to make their body and self special, aside from a sheer conformity to external expectations. Care for style can be read as evidence that fuller-figured individuals are worthy of being made special. This also further problematises the lack of availability of style for larger individuals.

Most participants discussed the importance of finding a style that is congruous with their self-concept. Whilst for Louise, finding a style is reportedly a matter of inner self-awareness and assertiveness, for the other participants, the development and exhibiting of a particular style is created in a dialectic relationship between the need to be perceived as adequate/attractive in the eyes of the other and the need to express one's idea of a real self.

I have always in a way accepted who I am but my problem has always been what people think of me (...) I have now learnt to be myself and also want to get back to who I am with my image without trying to be what I think I should be. In my 30's I have grown not only as a person, I understand what is going on in my head and yes I have body hang-ups, but I also know that I dress my weight very well. I just wish that I could find the edgy sexy and romantically structured look that I know I love and wear well. (SJ, blog)

Similarly to SJ, some participants negotiate the tension between a need to fit with others' expectations and a desire to express, through their clothing, who they really think they are. SJ highlighted the importance of finding style as part of her journey to self-acceptance and self-assertion. This was also echoed in the accounts

of other participants, namely José, Michaela, Louise, Laura, Elizabeth and me, who strive to develop a style that fits their tastes and personalities (and also daily moods). Finding style is also seen as an ongoing journey. This is less due to changes in fashion, as several participants see their long-earned sense of style as immune to whimsical fashion fluctuations. Rather, it becomes a journey to the extent that many participants seem to perceive their self, tastes and bodies as evolving with time.

As a final note on style, the experiential aspect of clothing/style is stated as being really important. Garments that fit comfortably, that do not hurt the body, nor restrict movement (and thus expression) are very important. For instance, José takes special care in choosing garments that do not 'mark' or 'hurt' her body. Similarly, Elizabeth chooses garments for elegance (with an aspect of hiding, too, as pointed to earlier) but also with a care for comfort and function:

I very rarely dance in a skirt... it's difficult to move around comfortably [dancing] in a skirt... (Elizabeth, pre-photo-session conversation)

This was also echoed in Michaela's and my accounts. Linda, who seems a bit less concerned about aesthetics in a general sense, also mentioned her satisfaction of recently finding shorts, in a plus-size boutique, which looked more contemporary but were also well-fitting and comfortable. Overall, this pointed to the importance of the experience of clothes and reemphasised the importance of self-awareness and self-care in the act of selecting clothes.

In the context of this interpretation, I have discussed style as a means of projecting attractiveness, by focusing on social expectations or the sense of an inner self. Despite the limited attention and care they receive from the marketplace, my participants highlighted the importance of style in shaping/expressing their self-concepts. According to Murray (2002), who builds upon the work of Thompson and Haytko (1997):

[S]tyle reflects a subject position, which signifies a vision of how society should be organized. Symbolic consumption is, therefore, political. Since consumers are faced with a plurality and complexity of subject positions, often demanding

contradictory responses, fashion becomes a way of mediating this complexity. (Murray, 2002: 436)

Tensions arise mainly as a means to balance out a desire to conform to social and marketplace expectations of adequacy/attractiveness, and a desire to express or assert what they see as their real self. Style has been identified as a battleground for legitimacy and dignity, as well as a potent opportunity for transgressive assertion and resistance by larger individuals (LeBesco, 2004; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). My participants' care, and varying perspectives on style, suggests that much more attention should be brought to their expectations and tastes, as well as to accommodating their varying body shapes in the fashion market, as a matter of identity politics.

7.2.4. Summary: from beauty as slenderness to beauty as connection with the inner self

Whilst it is generally suggested that fuller-figuredness is undesirable, and as such, it is also presumed that people in that embodied state should feel unattractive, all my participants could see attractiveness in the appearance of their bodies or that of other fat/fuller-figured individuals. To do so, participants can hardly rely on the set definition of attractiveness as 'slender'. Instead, their adherence to extended or alternative beauty definitions brings them to reject the discourse of 'fuller-figured women as unattractive'. These extended/alternative definitions enable alternative discursive positions in which fuller-figured women can be beautiful and sexy.

I think I'd pinpoint Nigella as my icon – I even have her name in my Facebook alias! She was gorgeous when she was a size 18 (...) and is still gorgeous as a size 12. (Sarah, blog)

Whilst fuller-figured women are referred to as physically beautiful, attractiveness is not just in terms of physical attributes, or commonly understood codes used to elicit desire from the viewer. Whilst common discourse positions the larger individual as 'unaware' of norms of attractiveness – or as Tischner (2013) puts it, as 'appearance-illiterate' – participants accounts generally suggest a strong awareness in terms of appearance-related social expectations. However, their focus is not entirely based on the desire to fulfil these mainstream expectations. Projecting beauty or

sexiness can be a matter of expressing confidence, pleasure and playfulness, which all boil down to being in touch and at peace with what is perceived as oneself. As such, attractiveness often involves an assertive self-awareness which implies being in touch with the body's experiences, and caring for the embodied self.

Although a good appearance came up as a particularly important notion for most participants including me, it did not seem to be as relevant for Linda. Whilst she cares about the social acceptability of body diversity, is sensitive to beauty and cares about comfort in clothes, projecting an attractive appearance as defined by beauty, sexiness or style did not seem to be a present concern for her. This distancing could be (or not) due to the fact that Linda does not abide to heterosexual norms, whereas traditional feminine norms of beauty are often seen as defined by a heterosexual/patriarchal view. This is not to say that people of non-normative sexual orientation are not affected by patriarchal beauty standards (quite the opposite, and especially so for younger women, according to Linda). However, whilst attractiveness is less of an issue for Linda, she is concerned that stereotypical understandings based on size and appearance can create negative inferences about the potential and cognitive abilities of larger individuals in contexts such as the workplace. Furthermore, she emphasises how she cares more about health – the next theme – than appearance.

I know many women who are dieting – and I know what I am talking about – especially now that they are getting older and falling into pre-menopause. Whether you like it or not, the body is changing. [My partner] and I have gained weight this way. But what is good about being with a woman who doesn't have this beauty criterion – but I do not want to say that there are no women that have this criterion, but maybe less than men – is that we gain weight and we tell ourselves: “no, no, we do exercise”... We do it together and we do it for our health, we don't do it necessarily for aesthetic appearance. (Linda, pre-photo-session conversation)

7.3. The redefinition of health: participants' accounts of soundness of the body and well-being

As we have seen, health is widely regarded as an important identity sphere. Though it is generally associated with the representation of slender bodies, it is interesting to see how most participants view themselves as healthy, or emphasise the importance of health in some form in their daily lives. This result, in itself, challenges the idea that larger individuals are oblivious to health and defies the culturally-pervasive idea that 'health' can only be envisioned in parallel with a slender body.

For many participants, specifically SJ, Laura and Sarah, 'attractive appearance' and 'health' are tightly interwoven. As pointed out by Sarah, who gave particular emphasis to the topic, '*beauty is HEALTH*':

I think it's important to re-iterate that I believe that bigger isn't necessarily better, although I think softer curves are more alluring than pointy bones – but to emphasise, yet again, that beauty is HEALTH. You can be 10 stone and utterly unhealthy, or you can be 16 stone and actually glowing. (Sarah, blog)

To SJ and Sarah, as well as to me, participating in this project was not only a way of stating that fuller-figured individuals can be beautiful and attractive, but also that they can be healthy.

However, very few participants aside from Elizabeth and I chose to be portrayed in a way that specifically emphasised their 'healthy' lifestyle – a fact that I found a bit disconcerting at first. Furthermore, since health is traditionally represented by slenderness, how is this perceived as being expressed in a self-presentation of fuller-figured individuals?

The importance of health for participants can, at times, be seen as aligned with 'a contemporary mindscape of healthism (...) that institutes self, body and lifestyle practices as a moral system' (Askegaard & Eckhardt, 2012: 4). As we have seen in the literature review, the definition of health itself can be seen as a social construction and is a source of some debate in the medical sphere (see for instance Heshka and Allison (2001) who question the categorisation of 'obesity' as a disease or a risk factor). From a medical perspective, there is a tendency to rely on visual signs, notably the

BMI, in order to assess or ensure the 'soundness' of the body. This reliance on appearance as a sign of health is also pervasive in the body culture marketplace. The marketplace (especially the diet industry) and several consumers have increasingly been associating the manifestation of body fat as not only an aesthetic concern, but a health hazard or problem requiring important attention (Askegaard et al., 1999). The marketplace uses 'health', or rather, 'the look of health' as an imperative to sell, amongst other things, slimming, rejuvenating, firming, colouring, camouflaging, whitening and glossing (cosmetic) products.

7.3.1. Health based on physical characteristics

For the participants, it seems that there are still some associations present between health and visual appearance, though a visual appearance that is thought of as reflecting health is not necessarily a slender one. Most participants seemed to suggest that being skinnier would not necessarily be healthier for them. Several participants spoke of a healthy look, which they defined by what it is not rather than what it is: not too fat (again, there is often a distancing from the medical term obese), not too skinny. These participants generally included themselves in the definition of a healthy person, or at least as part of this quest. Similarly, the terminology they liked or disliked using to describe themselves physically made associations with health and dissociations with poor health and the medical term 'obese' more particularly.

Of the participants, José, SJ and Sarah also mentioned the notion of 'being in proportion' as a sign that the body is adequate (providing that there is no other illness involved) from a health perspective. Two of these participants highlighted how their doctors had reportedly endorsed their good health condition due to that particular fact. This is also related to the hourglass figure being seen as natural and healthy for a woman, whereas the desire for annihilation of their natural curves is associated with unhealthy habits and attitudes, resulting in a weakened body.

Similarly, José, SJ, Laura, Sarah and I discussed how we see the stability of size/weight over years as an indicator that our body is close to its natural weight. Recalling how we have all been heavier than the norm for most of our lives (and how slenderness was only futile if achieved) is often seen as a way of legitimating our weight because it is meant to be heavier. For instance, Sarah explains:

In my entire adult life I have never been smaller than a size 14, and I had to work damned hard to get to that size – in fact my boyfriend at the time wanted me to get to a size 12 – a feat that wasn't achievable for me, even when going to the gym almost every day and eating very little. (Sarah, blog)

This understanding of health as determined by a greater (yet still limited) weight range, body proportions or weight stability over time, can be seen as fitting the definition of health based on the display of a sound weight, shape or appearance. But participants also came up with alternative definitions of 'health', which have less (or nothing) to do with appearance.

7.3.2. Health as absence of pain, illness or disability

Some participants envisioned health as a physical state (not necessarily apparent) devoid of pain and illness. For instance, Elizabeth was concerned about the pain experienced in her knee and saw weight loss as a way to remedy the situation. Another example can be found with Linda who points to her health concerns based on her emphysema. Unlike Elizabeth, who saw weight loss as a remedial means, Linda points out (without naivety) how accepting weight gain could lead to quitting smoking and hence a better health condition.

Linda: Listen, gaining weight, I am not saying that it will be totally positive, ok, but it is surely less negative than the cigarette. Sorting out the cigarette is much harder than sorting out the weight, ok. It's been eight times that I've tried to quit smoking, it's the eighth attempt, but I know it's a good one. And do you know why I know it's the right one? Because the seven previous times, I did not completely accept gaining weight... So, when I was seeing that I was putting weight on, I had an inner panic, so I would turn back to cigarettes (...) Yes, so I think that accepting to take a few pounds, erm, it might be the difference, it might be what makes it or breaks it. Crazy, hey?

Annie: How did you manage to accept gaining weight? Is it only because of the idea of being able to lose it afterwards?

Linda: Well, I think it's a mixture. It's been a year that I work by asking myself "What do I really want?" I asked myself several questions... Of course,

medically I am starting to suffer because I am starting to have emphysema (...) I have a decision to take. Do I want to live or do I want to die? Cigarettes, beyond anything, risk triggering things... (Linda, conversation)

Linda considers that her health condition is related to her smoking habit and that, had she not experienced such an intense 'inner panic' when gaining weight in the past from trying to quit smoking, it is likely that she would have quit long ago for good. Accordingly, Linda's past quest for slenderness can be seen as detrimental to her idea of health based on absence of illness. In Linda's case, accepting weight gain, albeit temporarily and with the aim of controlling it later, is also portrayed as a manifestation of her commitment to health.

Laura considers that her weight is not a hindrance because she experiences no pain nor exhibits any signs of illness:

But obviously technically I'm obese with my body fat... now if you measure that as a health thing, personally I don't, but the doctor would say "my goodness that in itself is a problem"... to me that would only be a problem if it were affecting other things. (Laura, pre-photo-session conversation)

Laura suggests that health has less to do with the manifestation of higher weight and more to do with the experience of health-related problems. However, she highlights her dissatisfaction with her current level of fitness, which she doesn't perceive as the outcome of weight fluctuation, but the impact within.

I've always been this shape, the difference... the only difference is that I used to dance a lot so, although I was always a bit thicker than the other girls my dancing kept me really fit (...) I think the minute people see a large person they automatically make assumptions that they are overweight, unfit, don't deserve the kind of empathy that's something I pick up quite a lot (...) you know, big assumption. I don't have any health problems whatsoever and I never have so you know people talk about diabetes things like that... I have been fit for life, my blood pressure is absolutely perfect, I don't have any overweight issues but I may not carry on. I'm nearly 40 but I wouldn't necessarily attribute that to being overweight. (Laura, pre-photo-session conversation)

Laura makes a distinction between being large and being 'overweight, unfit'; to her, large becomes overweight when you are unfit – the former does not necessarily imply the latter. Using herself as an example, she points to her body/self as being devoid of 'health problems' or 'overweight issues', though overall emphasises the importance of staying active to counteract the health implications that may arise with age. Laura, similarly to SJ, emits a concern about encouraging overweight-ness, however, 'because it's not the same for everybody I mean generally you need to change your [focus] on fitness rather than on fatness' (Laura, pre-photo-session conversation).

Laura speaks of feeling less fit at the moment, now that she doesn't have time to exercise. Instead of recognising this as a result of a change in weight, this reduced fitness is reflected in the fact that she feels more out of breath when going up steep hills, with which she would previously have had no problem. As such, rather than being about merely displaying a certain 'good' or 'bad' weight, health/fitness is assessed by means of experience, and presupposes a heightened inner self-awareness.

Health/fitness is also referred to as one's ability to engage in activities and achieve what one wants to do (within one's reasonable capabilities) with limited resulting discomfort. For instance, SJ asserts her fitness given her ability to swim across the Exe estuary (which also provided for a feeling of body adequacy, pride and confidence):

Last year I trained for almost six months and swam the Exe estuary. This achievement has taught me that my weight does not stop me doing anything. It is my mind, so now I know I can do anything I put my mind to. (SJ blog)

In a similar manner, the idea that health/fitness is an ability (or lack of disability) is present in Elizabeth's account, who suggests that she needed to resolve her recent knee pain through weight loss, in order to regain her ability to dance comfortably. As such, Elizabeth considered that the problem was less about the weight itself as an indicator of ill health, but about the inability to engage in her favourite activity due to experienced pain that developed over the recent years.

7.3.3. Health as an inner characteristic, or virtue

For many participants, the notion of 'health' also seems to encompass that of psychological health, which is associated with nurturing self-esteem and a positive attitude to the body, food and exercise. Whilst a couple of participants discussed how they feel their heavier weight betrays the use of food as an emotional coping mechanism (sometimes associated with low self-esteem), most other participants consider that striving to achieve a more slender figure can be associated with a 'neurotic', unhealthy attitude to the body, food and exercise. Having a balanced and relaxed attitude, which enables one to enjoy one's existence (her body, food, and activities) is core to several participants' envisioning of health. Furthermore, according to this emphasis on self-esteem as part of well-being, several participants seem to see the necessity to counter the psychological suffering associated with a feeling of body or self-inadequacy nurtured by society.

Well if I'm dancing in a photograph there's that sense of loving myself yet it's been a long time coming but it's there (...) that [self-love, goodness] is what children are born with and [it's taken away by the] system of education (...) generations of parental beliefs, myths.. rubbish! I'm quite angry about that! (...)the conditioning, the attitudes, that sort of hidden destructiveness of some of that which breaks down people and breaks down their confidence rather than enhances their creativity and their confidence to live and know themselves to be good people (...) I'm very unrealistic I suppose... that's what I work towards. (Elizabeth, pre-photo-session conversation)

For instance, in addition to her desire to becoming fit again, Laura also suggests that, to her, a lifestyle for fitness should not be detrimental to the enjoyment of life's pleasures. Whilst she is intending on getting fit again she insists:

For me that doesn't mean I'm going to change the way I eat or drink, it just means I'm going to be more physically active because that's where I'm happy. I do not like to deny myself and I love food. (Laura, pre-photo-session conversation)

A very interesting paradox raised by Laura is the idea of wanting to be represented as healthy, yet smoking and drinking (because, to me, a cigarette could

hardly be interpreted as healthy). Looking at the ensemble of her discussion, including the photos that she sent to me of Adele and Marilyn smoking, it appears that, for Laura and other participants alike, this notion of health is linked to self-care and pride in appearance, and also the notion of displaying confidence and poise.

Figure 22 Laura, photographed by Alice Deuchar

Thus, to go back to the question of how you represent 'health' or 'well-being' by means other than a specific appearance, I got a sense that several participants felt inherently healthy and that this 'health' could be conveyed by the amount of care they put into the presentation of their outer bodies and the assertiveness (their poise, happiness, comfort and pleasure) that would manifest through self-presentation. And that these would amount to a 'healthy glow'.

7.3.4. Health as an ongoing quest versus a conquest

With regards to the idea of fitness, certain participants – namely José, Laura, Sarah and me – also discussed sports as a means to get and stay fit; one that does not necessarily imply weight loss. Health/fitness is seen as a physical state and as providing an ability, but also, a quest – especially one that is ongoing despite the achievement of a certain target weight. Participants refer to this quest for fitness through self-care – the fact of entertaining an active and balanced lifestyle, including valuing good food – as a means to assert their health (again, providing they have no health problems). Similarly, Sarah seems to suggest that the body resulting from a

balanced active lifestyle – curvy and larger in her case – is an inherently healthy one (again, providing the absence of health problems).

I'm working out now and eating well to improve myself on the inside – the outside is a bonus! I don't need to be a size 10, I never did. (Sarah, blog)

This latter statement, which puts more emphasis on the maintenance of the inner body, seems to contradict the 'hallmark of consumer culture', where 'the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body is for the enhancement of the outer body' (Thompson and Hirschman 1995, building on Featherstone (Thompson and Hirschman 1995, building on Featherstone, 1991).

Importantly, to most participants, this quest for fitness through self-care should be enjoyable too. Participants discussed in length their involvement in physical activities, not only for the purpose of achieving/maintaining fitness (and sometimes weight loss such as in the case of Elizabeth), but as a source of pleasure in itself.

Laura, José, Elizabeth and I asserted our love of dancing, and a couple of participants went on at length about the visceral enjoyment of this activity.



Figure 23 Elizabeth, photographed by Alice Deuchar

Another participant, Sarah, takes part in 'Body Combat' classes as a means to stay fit, but also as a source of pleasure and fun. Similarly, whilst I swim to achieve and maintain fitness, I engage in this sport because I genuinely enjoy it: the experience of the water, the feeling of the worked-out muscles, the rush of endorphins after a good

swim and the satisfaction of engaging in an activity in which I can have a certain level of recognition from others.

7.3.5. Summary: from health as slenderness to an ongoing quest for well-being

Participants dedicated a significant portion of their conversations to discussing the notion of health. This may appear surprising considering that fuller-figuredness is so intensively framed as a medical problem at present, and rarely associated with health. Their conversations made it clear that they care immensely about health, unlike common stereotypes, and perhaps much more so because they do not rely on a slender body as a sole indicator of their health condition. They, in several cases including mine, positioned fuller-figuredness as a healthier option for them, in the well-being sense, which can be contrasted with the pursuit of health as defined by an oppressive idea of slenderness. Health, as in well-being, becomes a matter of self-care (and quest thereof) and an experience of subjective well-being for the participants.

Whilst the dominant understanding of health ("Health, n.") is in line with its definition of 'soundness' of the body the participants' various understandings of health seemed to better fit the definition of health as 'well-being' (in the psychological, emotional, moral but also spiritual sense, as well as in the physical sense). The difference between the two understandings of health has important implications on the way one envisions and actualises this quest.

'Soundness of body' ("Soundness, n.") points to *'that condition in which its functions are duly and efficiently discharged'*. Which raises the question: 'what is the function other than being alive and feeling well that fuller-figured people fail to accomplish?' That function can be seen as the achievement of a slender body, which is sound by virtue of its reflection of 'health' and moral adequacy. Health based on 'soundness of the body' is underscored by the moral imperative to display a controlled and disciplined 'perfect' body. This soundness, as an objectivist fact, is measurable by lack of 'defects' (of which high BMI is traditionally seen as one). Conversely, the concept of well-being ("Well-being, n. 1,") refers to *'[t]he state of being or doing well in life; happy, healthy, or prosperous condition; moral or physical welfare (of a person or*

community)'. Arguably, the latter can be seen as a more holistic and thus accessible concept, but also as an infinitely more subjective, experiential construct.

Well-being can be seen as both a quest (through self-care) and as a purpose or goal for its own sake that can be achieved in spite of mental or alleged physical 'flaws'. This seems to be true of weight for participants, but also of age and disability. For instance, Sarah's account suggests that her epileptic condition – seen as a flaw in the medical sense – is not much of a hindrance to achieving well-being, which she reportedly actively pursues by engaging in an active lifestyle balanced with good eating habits. Overall, a number of participants, particularly SJ, José, Laura, Linda, Sarah, Elizabeth and I, emphasised the importance we place on having a caring attitude to the self (namely with an active and balanced lifestyle) as a more reliable indicator – or rather, predictor – of health, versus health as slender appearance.

Participants extend the definition of health and reposition it as a more general quest for well-being (which is seen as distinct, and even at times antagonist to a slender physical appearance). For participants in general, 'health', as it is commonly defined, is reframed as just one possible way of achieving well-being: a general sense of inner wellness which can include elements such as feeling fit, good, happy, balanced, confident and being able to achieve what one pleases or needs to do with limited discomfort. These feelings require inner self-awareness about one's needs and states (as opposed to a pure reliance on external expectations and size), as well as an ethos of self-care, manifested in different forms for the participants (including healthy/balanced food habits, an active/balanced lifestyle and caring for one's emotional wellness).

7.4. The redefinition of virtue: participants' accounts of desirable inner characteristics

In contrast with the moral ideology of self-discipline and self-control, the expression of inner characteristics such as assertiveness, inner and social self-awareness, as well as self-care, are determinant (in different respects) in making up for a good appearance and health for several participants. These inner characteristics valued by the participants often go beyond those that are idealised according to the 'Western

metaphysical mindset' and with the depiction of 'ideal' women in the visual culture arena.

Some characteristics valued by the participants can be associated with the cultural valuing of rationality, and tend to be coded as ideal male traits in Western society (Hirschman, 1993; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Illouz, 2008; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994). Characteristics such as assertiveness, resilience, resourcefulness and professionalism in the workplace – valued in certain circumstances by Linda, SJ, Michaela, José, Elizabeth and me – can be read as 'quintessentially' male virtues, and associated with a more Cartesian mindset. Other characteristics, however, seem to foster a greater connection with 'quintessentially feminine' elements: the body and emotions.

7.4.1. The 'virtue' of self-awareness

Laura provides an excellent case for this assertive clash with Judeo-Christian expectations. Her self-portrait, envisioned as a positive, sexy depiction, goes against the grain of several Judeo-Christian virtues by suggesting an awareness (and assertiveness) of her embodied desires, as opposed to a denial or repression of them. Laura indulged in a proud, sexy self-presentation. She also wanted to be portrayed enjoying party food, cocktails and a 'cheeky' cigarette whilst 'not-so-patiently' waiting for guests to arrive. Overall, instead of being represented as virtuous, in the Judeo-Christian sense (humble, patient, ascetic and chaste), she embraces just the opposite; Laura's portrait can be interpreted as a manifestation of pride, hedonism and embodied desires. In one of our conversations, she favourably compared this image of the person who allows herself to indulge at times in her desires for scrumptious food with that of women who deprive themselves or 'obsess' to achieve or maintain a slender figure (though she does not suggest that the slender silhouette in itself is not attractive). This was also expressed by Sarah, who referred to her 'icon' Nigella:

She (...) looks like if you took her out for a meal she wouldn't be ordering fizzy water and a garden salad, pushing it about her plate looking miserable. I think it's much more attractive if a woman isn't afraid of a few extra calories as a treat. (Sarah, blog)

Allowing oneself to enjoy life's little pleasures and indulge in desires – within a perspective of self-care and self-awareness –, has been described as an attractive or positive inner characteristic by Sarah, Laura, Louise, Elizabeth, José, Michaela and me. This notion of positive inner characteristics, seen as both fun, sensual and making up for a sexier character, seems to boil down to being in touch with and assertive about one's bodily desires.

Similarly, participants have been wanting to put forward alternative inner traits and characteristics, such as creativity, assertiveness, self-love, free-spiritedness and hedonism, as well as the ability to embrace one's sense of 'real' self, with its quirks, intensities and contradictions:

[Photo number] 3727: This is very much like me... There is an intensity. That's what is here, there is an intensity... It is interesting because I have always been an intense person and in this country, you know, people say 'You are very nice but, you know, a bit intense'. [She then goes on to explain how someone embraced her and told her earnestly] 'oh!' she said, 'I love your intensity!' and ALL that stuff for all my life went, and I just thought 'to the hell with it' I thought, 'I quite like my intensity' but when you are constantly put down... so that was interesting... and never again did I ever think, 'oh god! This is too much'... (Elizabeth, photo review)



Figure 24 Elizabeth, photographed by Alice Deuchar

In this quote, Elizabeth highlights how she values the expression of intense emotions, versus the repression of those as it is expected by social (Judeo-Christian) expectation.

Valued inner characteristics (which also make up for an attractive appearance and health/well-being) depend on three main characteristics which are inner self-awareness, assertiveness and self-care.

7.4.2. The 'virtue' of nurturing self-care

Caring for others is extremely important to participants. This came up frequently in their accounts; for example Louise and José are involved in and committed to social and animal welfare causes. However, care for others should not be at the expense of care for the self. This idea is patent in the portraits and accounts of many participants.

For instance, most participants are mothers already or are anticipating starting a family in the near future. All of them seem to regard this role very dearly and seriously. Whilst Judeo-Christian tradition positions a virtuous woman as selfless, altruistic, motherly and asexual, it seems that this is at odds with the way several participants envision themselves and think about how they want to be represented. Though she asserts being a caring mother, Laura insists that she is 'definitely not the mumsy type, and would not like to be portrayed in that way' (Laura, pre-photo-session email). Laura contrasts sexiness with the image of the 'mumsy mum' and argues that '[o]ften larger ladies are portrayed as homely or mumsy, and that's not always the case'. One possible interpretation of why this homely 'mumsy mama' depiction would be viewed as an undesirable cliché for Laura, but also for SJ and me, is that it can be seen as representing someone who is so concerned with others that she loses touch with herself.

Other participants, more generally, also distance themselves from this 'mumsy' stereotype whilst valuing more self-caring lifestyles, including the pursuit of fulfilling romantic, creative, professional, joyful, hedonistic existences. In this sense, the idea of caring for others cohabits with that of listening to and caring for the self, as well as fulfilling one's needs and desires (to a certain extent), and taking pride in one's image. Importantly, self-care for participants seem to be perceived less in the self-disciplinary

sense (as in a Foucauldian sense), but rather coming from caring inner self-awareness and understanding.

7.4.3. The ‘virtue’ of assertiveness and social critique

Thompson and Hirschman (1995) discuss social self-awareness (which borders social self-consciousness), where an individual needs to exert surveillance to ensure the body/self-adequacy in a moral paradigm about self-control/panopticism:

[A] person’s sense of being a volitional subject who can exercise self-control presupposes a high degree of self-awareness. Conversely, this self-awareness arises through socialization in cultural beliefs, standards, and normative values that define the aspects of one’s life that should be controlled. Therefore, the self-aware subject is simultaneously subject to a multitude of sociocultural influences. These influences can range from the pronouncements of culturally sanctioned experts (such as medical doctors statements about healthy or unhealthy eating habits) to subtle social pressures to conform to a particular “look”. (1995: 142)

Whilst participants generally show that they are highly aware of the social expectations (and sometimes greatly tempted to conform), their accounts often suggest more emphasis on a quest for self-esteem via self-acceptance and assertiveness:

I can be quite critical about erm... the...age I see in my face... but I could be critical, I am not being critical but I could be if you know what I mean, and that is just... there is a joy here and it goes beyond all of that... You know, there is a sense of being in love with life. I am very in love with life, at the moment, you know, it could change, but just at the moment... I am very in love with life. And I have a lot of love for myself which has been, you know, [a long time coming]. (Elizabeth, first photo review)

This autonomous self/body acceptance often implies being more critical of social expectations. For instance, Elizabeth discusses her belief that people’s self-definition according to social expectations leads to a lack of self-esteem, coming from the inability to connect with the ‘inner self’:

I think a lot of the lack of self-esteem comes from having this aspect [that consolidation, quiet confidence that “I am a sexual person, I am attractive”] squashed. We start this... I don't know about you in Montreal, but in this country, it's still quite (...) Puritan in terms of little girls. If they are sitting with their knees open it's “close your legs, don't do that, don't walk like that”. You know it's all sort of provoking the Puritanism. So people don't learn to live with who they are, they have been told they've got to be a different persona... (Elizabeth, pre-photo-session conversation)

For her, the socially pervasive lack of self-esteem is thought to come from a cultural conditioning where people (especially young girls) are being kept from cultivating inner self-awareness and assertiveness and instead, are socialised into an ideology of self-control, associated with a quest for adequacy and conformity as defined by the outsider. This idea of suspicion towards social norms was also echoed in the accounts of other participants and is demonstrated by the importance they give to learning to choose wisely those you surround yourself with. This often comes by assessing the ability of others to see beyond mainstream conventions. This was discussed by SJ, Sarah, Michaela, Linda, José and me in relation to choosing an adequate partner. As explained by José:

Guys are willing to be with gals who are different at home... but in the street? Erm... You know, it's a matter of education. You need audacious people and I am aware of this, you know. When a man walks along a street holding me by the hand, by the arm, by the waist, it is a man who is audacious, who is self-assured. (...) The one who is going to present himself with someone who is a bit different, with some excess weight, is someone who is really self-assured and to whom whatever people say has less impact. It is not someone who is attached to that [social image] otherwise they are not able to handle it (referring to men as public figures, especially). I think it's true and it is not that frustrating to me, it's just [the way it is]. And at the same time, would I want to be with someone who is not assertive, who is not proud of himself, who is not solid? That's what I'm realising... (José, conversation)

José suggests that people who are more accepting of non-normative body identities are more attractive and morally worthy to her (self-assured, free-spirited,

etc.). Other participants, specifically SJ, Sarah, Michaela, Linda and I (though not excluded by Louise and Laura) also emphasised the importance of surrounding ourselves with individuals (romantic partners especially) who value us just as we are. These relationships are characterised, in participants' accounts, as being much more wholesome, healthy, self-esteem enhancing and fulfilling than relationships with partners who are encouraging weight loss (especially on the basis of aesthetic reasons). However, this should not be mistaken for the erroneous idea that participants, for one reason or another, would pick just anybody who is interested. Learning to find the right partner has been discussed by several participants as part of a journey towards finding what they consider as their 'authentic' self.

7.4.4. The 'virtuous' quest for the 'authentic' self

Participants often implicitly referred to a core, 'essential' self. This could be witnessed when they suggested that 'larger' is probably who they are meant to be, especially given their experienced inability to sustain a slender weight, or the enduring stability of their heavier weight. These experiences (enhanced by the intensity of past weight-loss and self-loathing sagas) are often used as a premise to (try to) accept their body in its current state – as an integral part of the self – and as a legitimate entity that deserves attention and therapeutic self-care. This perspective can be contrasted with the mainstream one where the body can and should be controlled (disciplinary self-care) in order to achieve a thin 'essential self' in a cultural context that fosters the belief that our essential self is presumably skinny (Erdman, 1995; Kent, 2001; Levy-Navarro, 2008; Levy-Navarro, 2009). This pervasive cultural belief is echoed in the work of Schouten (1991) and Thompson and Hirschman (1995) who report how their research participants have a strong sense of wanting to modify or control their bodies to better reflect their true selves. However, in the context of this research, some participants discussed their current size (and to a greater extent, 'curves') as an 'essential' trait and suggested that 'draconian' attempts to alter the body can be perceived as a risk to lose one's 'true' self.

Another indication of this idea of an essential self comes from the discussion of participants developing 'masks' to gain social acceptance or as a means of 'survival'. These were discussed by the participants as including humour, toughness and 'over-

sexualisation'. These traits were discussed in conjunction with a desire to recover a 'real' self that has been long oppressed by this masquerade. As discussed by Linda:

Linda: Fat and serious [films], we don't see that. We don't see many of those. Those dealing with fat people are always based on laughter. Like the fat one makes us laugh, hey? You are funnier when you are fat! You are more of a clown!

Annie: How do you find this representation?

Linda: It can be funny. You can be funny, you know, but... There needs to be a balance... There needs to be a balance... Because fat people are not all clowns! (laugh) They act as clowns precisely to mask something... (Linda, conversation)

In other cases, however, there was more emphasis on the fact that the social experience of fuller-figuredness – though painful and unwished for, especially when younger – pushed some participants to develop resilience and valuable personal characteristics. Whilst some participants emphasised how masks such as humour and 'over-sexualisation' have reductionist properties and camouflage a more complex identity, to other participants, particularly José, acquired traits are seen to contribute to identity complexity. For instance, José pointed out how being heavier is less conducive to her using straightforward flirtatiousness to accomplish her ends in professional encounters. Though it has been suggested that she could use it positively as well, her internalised social experience has caused her to adopt a more 'Cartesian' (serious and professional) approach, one that is thought to add to her repertoire of professional and identity qualities. Humour is also seen in such a way for her.

Participants' accounts often suggested that the social experience of 'fuller-figuredness' causes them to further develop elements such as creativity (in developing a style, finding suitable clothes), discernment (to find the right people to surround themselves with), empathy (for the experience of social discrimination and self-loathing of others), critical thinking (towards social expectations, especially with regards to the idealisation of thinness), and proactive self-care based on inner self-awareness (as opposed to the reliance on normative slenderness as an indicator of

health). Thus, participants often include their life history (with embodied and social experiences, reflexive journey and current materiality of the body) as part of what they perceive as their real self.

The notion of biographic history, or narratives of the self, becomes especially important for several participants who referred to the idea that their existence (and self-concept) would probably have been different if body diversity had been more valued or accepted (and it is not so much about the weight or size itself, but rather the social, internalised pressure to fit in with a narrow norm). The social experience of 'fuller-figuredness' was generally discussed by participants as a marking identity/social experience. As such a marking phenomenological experience, 'fuller-figuredness' is also one that can remain engraved in the self-concept of participants even if individuals lose weight. For some individuals, it manifests as an everlasting fear to gain weight back (a fear of pounds insidiously creeping on you, as discussed by St-James, Handelman, and Taylor (2011)), whereas for José, Elizabeth and me, this change is due to having our vision of the world altered for good; requiring more criticality towards social expectations and conception of an ideal self. Generally speaking, for participants in this research, the fact of not conforming to the slender norm, despite consistent attempts to do so in the past, is seen as a basis to seek self-esteem on the grounds of self-acceptance in the present, as opposed to self-control in hope of 'achieving' an ideal self in the future. Whilst the notion of 'ideal self' has been considered highly relevant as a driver for consumption (see Karanika & Hogg, 2010; Schouten, 1991), participants' accounts in this research suggest that the notion of 'actual self', informed by one's biographic history, should not be dismissed as irrelevant, or over and done with.

English and fat studies scholar Levy-Navarro (2008, 2009) points out how, in the mainstream vision, the ideal self is often seen as the 'after' of the 'before-and-after' weight-loss rhetoric. In this sense, the present fat self, positioned as an undesirable 'before', needs to be transcended in order to embrace a thin 'happy ever after' self. Contrary to this popular quest and vision of the self, participants – whether they adopt an essentialist, constructivist or hybrid vision of the self – seemed to question, at least in the context of this research, the existence of a thin, 'happy ever after' essential self. At least for the period of time during the photo shoot and research, participants spoke

of their bodies and self in the ‘here and now’ without referring to their fuller body as being a temporary body, or as a material hindrance to the expression of what they perceive as their ‘real’ self (and this is despite the fact that participants often pointed to some alleged body ‘flaws’). This perspective gives them the possibility to live a proud and fulfilling existence by being who they are in the present. Their current outer body, seen as an integral part of the self, acts as a prime medium for experience, meaning-making (often positive/legitimising), expression and interaction with the world.

As such, participants’ understanding of the self seems to set aside, to some extent, the traditional duality between the mind and the body, where the body needs to be controlled and transcended in order to accomplish the existence envisioned by the soul – the ‘real’ locus of identity according to a Judeo-Christian vision. Several participants seem to see the body as a locus of expression and experience, which both contribute to the construction and assertion of the self (including both the body and the mind). In this sense, their perspectives can be seen as embodied – seeing the body as an integral part of the self –, as opposed to a more general pursuit of disembodied transcendence.



Figure 25 José, photographed by Alice Deuchar

Finally, whilst fuller-figuredness has been referred to as a distinctive, marking element for several participants, ‘it can’t be seen as the only story’ (as José put it) to

make sense of the self. This points to a problem with qualifying the participants first and foremost on the basis of their weight. Factors such as age, roles, relationships, sexual orientation and group affiliations were discussed as affecting participants in different contexts and life situations in spite of size. As such, to reuse one of Levy-Navarro's ideas (2008, 2009), other stories about the self can be told in different ways – and importantly – can include, but are not restricted to, a variety of loving attachments to the body.

7.4.5. Summary: from moral virtues to quest for the 'authentic' self

In Judeo-Christian sense, in order to achieve self-actualisation, one needs to control and discipline the body so that it reflects the strength of the soul (via virtues of asceticism, temperance and modesty, namely). This logic is accompanied by a view of the body that requires control and discipline (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995), as well as hate and denial of the non-compliant (fat) body/identity.

The moral principle of controlling or disciplining the body has been picked up in the narratives of different participants and discourses analysed by CR researchers (Schouten, 1991; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Askegaard et al., 2002). Traditionally speaking, self-care is seen as a synonym of self-discipline. However, the present research suggests a very different moral outlook. Instead of a definition of morality based on these 'disembodied' aspirations (see Thompson & Hirschman, 1995), this alternative definition of positive inner traits, rather, seems to be based on those which provide for self-esteem, namely through self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-care.

7.5 Conclusion interpretation: revisiting the equation of moral adequacy

Amongst the important themes addressed by the participants to make sense of (and also often to legitimise) their identity were the three notions of having an attractive appearance, health and 'virtues' or inner qualities.

In the case of the women involved in this research, there is an extension or subversion of the definitions of these traditionally valued identity constructs. As we

have seen, the notion of beauty or attractiveness as characterised by slenderness is being challenged by some of the participants, who see beauty and attractiveness as a more extended concept including more body diversity and style as well as attitude (which eventually boils down to self-love and self-care). Self-awareness and expression of the self, which is seen as encompassing the embodied experience (desires, feelings, pleasures, quirks, as well as self-love and care) and the materiality of the body (with its history and associated characteristics), can be contrasted with the suppression of these bodily elements in the cultural idealisation of more generally ascetic bodies.

The notion of health, which is also seen by some participants as making for a beautiful appearance, is also rethought. Health as 'soundness of the body', defined as (and, at the same time, for the purpose of) having an attractive, slender/hyper-toned appearance, is replaced by the notion of health defined by a more general notion of well-being. This notion of well-being, rather than being assessed by the resulting weight, is demonstrated in experience (not being ill, feeling fit, feeling good and confident about oneself...) and ability to engage in enjoyable activities within one's 'realistic' physical and mental capacity. Rather than focusing on weight loss or control as a means of achieving 'health', the focus is on self-care, by entertaining an active/balanced lifestyle and/or by caring for oneself emotionally.

The notion of 'virtue', or inner characteristics, as expressed in the participants' self-presentation or conversations, can also be contrasted with the more traditional virtues idealised in Western marketplace of visual culture as part of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Instead of asceticism, selflessness, altruism or modesty, participants focus on their self-love, self-care, self-awareness, assertiveness, pleasure, eloquence, creativity and intensity. They are not ascetic, meek or selfless, and there is a sense that there is more to enjoy in life than the pursuit of Judeo-Christian 'purity' and disembodied transcendence. The various inner traits valued by participants suggest that they are individuals seeking to live a fulfilling, embodied existence.

Thus, as we can see, the traditional equation 'virtues=>health=>slender beauty' discussed in consumer research is altered by the participants. In some cases, the equation no longer holds. In such cases, if the participants care about health and

appearance, their accounts and portraits suggest that these spheres are not essential ways for them of making sense of the self. In a few cases, even, the terms are seen in contradiction with one another: where the quest for a good appearance (especially slenderness) is seen as hindering the quest for health and well-being, as well as what some participants term as the quest for an authentic self.

In most cases however, all the terms of the equation are seen as valuable and interlinked with one another. However, whilst the equation still ‘holds’, the definitions of the terms are often extended. Slenderness is not seen as the only form of physical beauty, and is not seen as necessarily healthy or resulting from a healthy lifestyle. As such, fuller-figuredness can be seen as beautiful and healthy as well as resulting from a healthy lifestyle. To other participants, the equation still ‘holds’ under the condition that the definitions of the terms are not only extended, but completely changed – thus further subverting the dominant understandings of positive appearance, health and virtue. To some of them at least, the definition of health goes far beyond the notion of (sound) appearance. Furthermore, the definition of positive inner characteristics is not necessarily reflected in Judeo-Christian virtues of self-discipline, control, selflessness and ascetism. Rather it can be seen as coming from the ability to be aware of, care for, and assert the embodied self, which has generally been discussed as the result of a (ongoing) journey towards self-acceptance. Instead of a set slender ideal which acts as a gauge of aesthetic, medical, moral righteousness, some of the participants use the idea of their ‘inner self’ as a compass to guide them towards the right thing to do, the right way to be. Importantly, this ‘inner self’ encompasses the idea of experience (embodied experience, desires, passions, feeling, past experience, biography) as opposed to the idea of appearance as defined by a slender ideal.

The participants’ accounts thus point to alternative ways of negotiating traditional tensions associated with attractiveness, health and virtue.

In the context where fatness is seen as an undesirable trait at odds with ideals of attractiveness based on slenderness, exhibiting fuller-figuredness could be readily interpreted as an autonomous disengagement from the desire to be attractive. But this is far from being the case here. This tension seems to be (partly) resolved, or, at least, more easily workable with participants adopting an alternative definition of attractiveness. The latter is developed in a dialectic relationship between the need to

be perceived as adequate/attractive in the eyes of the other and the need to express ones' idea of authentic self.

In their discussion of food-related discourses, Chrysochou et al. (2010); Kristensen et al. (2011) and Kristensen et al. (2013) highlight an existing tension between ideals of hedonism (supported by the current 'foodie' culture) and ideals of ascetism/healthism. In the context where fatness is seen as an undesirable trait associated with hedonistic over-indulgence and where slenderness is assumed to be reflecting a righteous healthy lifestyle, exhibiting fuller-figuredness could be interpreted as a propensity towards hedonism which is at odds with health orthodoxies. Participants, adopting an alternative 'self-nurtured' position, partly resolved this tension by altering the definition of health, which, instead of relying on self-denial (or on slenderness), is based on a more holistic notion of well-being. This notion of well-being implies inner self-awareness (feeling fit, feeling good, feeling happy, etc.) and is accompanied by practices of self-care. Conversely, a healthy body is often thought to be identifiable when emanating happiness and poise.

Finally, authors such as Hirschman (1993), Joy and Venkatesh (1994), Thompson and Hirschman (1995) point to the importance of Judeo-Christian virtues that imply self-control and denial (as opposed to inner self-awareness and assertiveness). In the context where fatness is perceived as a lack of self-discipline, exhibiting fuller-figuredness can be seen as an unvirtuous form of embodiment, associated with unvirtuous inner traits. However, participants seemed to partly resolve this tension as well, by adopting an alternative definition of what constitutes positive inner traits. This new definition implies care for others to an important extent, but very importantly as well, notions of inner self-awareness, assertiveness and self-care.

As such, instead of constructing themselves negatively, most participants seemed to write themselves in the definition of 'attractiveness', 'health' and 'virtue' by specifically valuing notions of inner self-awareness, assertiveness and self-care. As we will discuss further in the following discussion, these three notions act as a basis for a journey towards self-actualisation and self-esteem based on body/self-acceptance.

8. Discussion

8.1 'The agency problem'

As it was laid out from the start of this thesis, participants deal with a strong social pressure to conform to slenderness and reject fatness on aesthetic, medical and moral grounds. They also deal with important social constraints such as discrimination as well as a lack of offering in terms of clothes (which can be seen as something particularly important for self-construction/expression). All of this can be seen as converging towards a commonplace self-actualisation project based on suppression of fatness and quest for slenderness. However, this is not necessarily the case for the majority of the participants, who attempt to resist this quest for slenderness by seeking self-esteem based on self-acceptance. Rather than being a completely autonomous act of resistance, however, this could be more astutely read as a dialectic interaction with the (marketplace) structure, mitigated by the pursuit of a discourse of self-acceptance as well as self-control.

As pointed to by Caruana et al. (2008), *'[t]he tension between individuals and the institutions that shape and confine them, and the subverted contradiction between a notion of an "independent" or "authentic self" and a "social self", raises a structure–agency type debate'* (2008: 256). Adopting a more dialectic view of self and structure allows us to focus on the question of *'how consumers construct a positive sense of self rather than from where they seek independence'* (2008: 256).

Askegaard and Linnet (2011) also challenge the idea of consumers' unencumbered creativity and autonomy given an internalisation of social/cultural norms and social constraints (such as those discussed as affecting the participants). They highlight, however, that structures can be altered by acts of improvisation in consumer practices. As they point out:

These acts arise continually in that actors never face a completely predictable outcome of the social symbolic exchanges in which they engage, and because social rules are always abstract, never prescribing specifically the conduct that will lead to a desired outcome in any social situation. The analysis of practice thus encompasses the reproduction of social boundaries that is simultaneous with the ongoing formulation of strategies by actors, their improvisation in the

face of unanticipated consequences and ambiguous responses, and their experience of self-actualization, creativity and rebellion. (2011: 389)

Rather than being seen as purely creative and emancipated from the system, individuals are seen as having to make 'strategic' decisions (that may involve acts of creativity and rebellion) according to opportunities and necessities that arise as part of an unstable, ever-moving social structure. In a poststructuralist perspective, these social structures are shaped by, and consist of, changing discourses as well. Concomitantly, consumers' (limited) creativity and acts of rebellions translate in self-positioning within available discourses, and, as such, adoption of possible discursive positions. Importantly, this implies that participants' alternative perspectives need to be enabled in some ways.

8.1.1 From the moral Judeo-Christian discourse to the 'psy' therapeutic discourse

Unlike in the Judeo-Christian perspective where self-esteem emerges as moral adequacy coming from exertion of self-control (and resulting slenderness), the participants attempt to find self-esteem without significantly altering who they think they are (including their bodies). Their perspectives share many affinities with the 'therapeutic discourse' influenced by early psychoanalytical theories (Illouz, 2008). This therapeutic discourse seems to have enabled some participants to turn away (at least partly, and particularly in the context of a research celebrating body diversity) from a dominant moral discourse valuing slenderness as a dominant signifier of 'goodness'. [With hindsight, this discourse has also heavily tinted my approach as a feminist researcher valuing self and body-esteem.] Though there is generally an emphasis on the influence of the moral Judeo-Christian ethos in shaping the ways we understand our bodies and selves, a few authors have also discussed the increasing influence of the therapeutic discourse in shaping individuals' quests for well-being and the good life (Jantzen, Fitchett, Østergaard, & Vetner, 2012; Moisio & Beruchashvili, 2010).

Illouz (2008) investigates the pervasiveness of the therapeutic discourse as a late-modern cultural structure and how it provided a language to shape a new understanding of selfhood and the good life in Western societies. Using the work of Foucault, she points out that:

The therapeutic is a site within which we invent ourselves as individuals, with wants, needs, and desires to be known, categorized, and controlled for the sake of freedom. Through the twin category of “sex” and the “psyche”, psychoanalytical practice makes us look for the truth about ourselves and is thus defined in terms of discovering that truth and finding emancipation in the search for it. What makes “psy discourses” particularly effective in the modern era is that they make the practice of self-knowledge a simultaneously epistemological and moral act. (Illouz 2008: 3)

As such, ‘salvation’ in the ‘psy’ therapeutic sense, is associated with knowledge of the ‘real’ self as a thinking, emotional and sexual being. Furthermore, instead of coming from the exertion of virtue, a positive sense of self comes from not just the achievement of self-knowledge, but the very quest for that self-knowledge. The ‘psy’ therapeutic discourse is used *‘to build coherent selves, procure intimacy, provide a feeling of competence in the realm of work, and facilitate social relations in general* (Illouz 2008: 20).

As previously discussed, the traditional understanding of identity is based on the respect of moral traditions and the exertion of self-control in order to fit with a morally-righteous idea of the self. In contrast, the therapeutic discourse, which emerged and evolved from Freud’s psychoanalytic theories, emphasises the importance of authenticity, self-knowledge and introspection as part of the quest for a desirable (as in ‘normal’, ‘psychologically healthy’ and fulfilled) self. Illouz (ibid) provides several reasons, including a variety of sociocultural, economic and political upheavals that occurred in the first half of the 20th century, for the adoption of the therapeutic discourse, and its popularity in present day US (and more generally American-influenced Western) society. Freud’s psychoanalytic theories were timely and perceived as more suitable discursive options to make sense of novel identity experiences and events. But also, importantly, Freud’s discourse, or ‘narratives of selfhood’, consisted of a compelling re-articulation of the long-accepted Judeo-Christian order, (or equation) by recycling the ‘narrative of salvation’. The therapeutic discourse shifted the idea of ‘salvation’ away from the religious moral perspective (achieving salvation from life suffering via moral righteousness) to the ‘scientific’ realm of psychoanalysis/psychology (achieving salvation from psychic suffering via

introspection). Furthermore, by emphasising how *'ordinary occurrences found in every normal person are the stuff of which pathology is made'*, Freud moved away from a vision of identity based on essential 'good' or 'bad' moral traits and *'blur[red] the distinction between pathology and normality'* (Illouz, 2008: 42).

This move parallels the shift from moral to medical framing of fatness. However, as we will see, differences can be perceived between the moral to the (bio)medical discourse move, and the moral to the 'psy' therapeutic discourse conversion. By shifting the focus towards 'health' and 'normality', and away from 'good' or 'bad', Freud created more ambiguity as well as room for subjective (self-)interpretation, instead of the *'relatively unambiguous normative prescriptions (e.g., "premarital sex is impure; abstinence, self-control, and virginity are pure")'* used under the traditional moral system to regulate and judge the self (Illouz, 2008: 44). Freud's new categories were open to interpretation because they *'lacked a clear signified and did not function in a system of symbolic boundaries that clearly delineated desirable and undesirable behaviour'* (Illouz, 2008: 44). In other words, Freud's approach did not identify clear definitions for categories such as 'psychological health', 'normality' and 'pathology'. This unspecific approach and rampant ambiguity in Freud's path to salvation can be seen, according to Illouz, as accounting for its power; its ability to render anybody eligible for salvation, and by the same token, for problematisation and scrutiny.

Whilst the 'psy' therapeutic discourse is open and blurs boundaries between the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the medical realm insists on defining these terms with strict boundaries; with the example of 'overweight' and 'underweight', which can be contrasted with the 'healthy normal'. These boundaries are based on the very tangible notions of weight/BMI, and, importantly, exclude other more subjective or personally-driven aspects such as relation to the self and lifestyle that could be perceived as alternative grounds for health (and likewise, problematisation). According to the (bio)medical discourse, fatness can be seen as an essentially bad problem to the extent that it falls in a 'bad' BMI range. The marketplace pushes this definition further by generally adopting an even narrower ideal of appearance as a signifier of health, beauty and prestige. This signifier is used to enjoin individuals in the pursuit of weight loss and beautifying practices with an emphasis on the achievement of the 'right' look.

In contrast with the moral and medical models which promote the achievement of a slender body ideal, the therapeutic discourse is more ambiguous about the definition of the object of its quest (with no clear signifier attached), and focuses on the process itself. This perpetual process of self-scrutiny/ self-interpretation generates an equally perpetual process of *'narrativization of the self' shaped by '[p]ast and present events, spoken or unspoken problems, figures of the past and current relations'* (Illouz, 2008: 46–47) used in the search for the authentic self, authentic desires and the source of identity problems.

The therapeutic mindset – 'rooted in notions of psychological well-being defined in self-referential terms, with an emphasis on judgments anchored in personal feelings rather than in the aegis of theology, clergy, or reason' (Moisio & Beruchashvili, 2010: 859) – is also used to promote weight loss or weight-loss programmes. In their research study of American Weight Watchers' support groups, Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) highlight the cohabitation of the Judeo-Christian and the therapeutic persuasions as part of the groups' discursive practices:

We find that although in its positioning, the organization focuses on physical well-being (weight loss and its maintenance), in the emergent combination of formulaic and free-form conduct of support group meetings, members of Weight Watchers construe their pursuit of well-being in light of the spiritual-therapeutic model. The Weight Watchers support group prospers as it orchestrates the therapeutic confession, the system of therapeutic oversight, and the autotherapeutic testimonial. (2010: 858)

Whilst Moisio and Beruchashvili (ibid) argue for the presence of the therapeutic ethos, it seems, however, that the groups' practices and beliefs are still highly embedded in a moralistic-religious mindset: believing in the necessity of confession, but also mild punitive coercion, believing in quasi-divine oversight and paternalism, as well as traditional definitions of virtues. Their practices are also geared towards a form of transcendental revitalisation upon the achievement of weight loss, and towards spreading the 'good news' which is highly reminiscent of evangelist practices (Moisio & Beruchashvili, 2010).

Whereas the cohabitation between the Judeo-Christian and therapeutic mindset is unsurprising considering that the latter has borrowed the structure and content of the traditional moral narrative of salvation, there are important nuances to be made, which distinguish Weight Watchers' religious therapeutic approach, with the slightly more secular therapeutic quest of my participants.

On one hand, a less religious therapeutic discourse implies the notion of a quest for individual well-being, authenticity or intimacy (as opposed to an achievement), and on the other, it maintains an ambiguity in the definition of the object of this quest (implicit in the use of broader and more subjective terms such as well-being, authenticity and intimacy).

One of the particularities of Weight Watchers is to emphasise the journey towards well-being (used as a synonym of weight loss), including identification of habits, emotional relationship with foods and determination of strategies. However, 'well-being' – or 'salvation' – is ultimately to be achieved with the successful attainment of an ideal weight. Weight Watchers' philosophy does presuppose that the authentic, good self is, if not slender, at least thinner and within a circumscribed 'good' BMI range. As such, it also maintains narrowly defined archetypes/signifiers of success, health and authenticity.

Conversely, my research participants expressed a desire for ambiguity in the definition of the self. This is paired with a subjective definition of what they see and seek as an attractive, healthy, and adequate 'real' self. Examples of this desire for ambiguity can be seen in participants' refusal of words such as 'obese', 'round', 'fat', or 'large', which are perceived as too literal and contriving. Accordingly, participants preferred the use of words such as 'voluptuous', 'curvy', 'curvaceous', 'fuller', or 'enrobée'²¹/ 'enrobed', which remain more ambiguous:

I like this word 'enrobée' because it does not define. I do not like definition. I do

²¹ Again, 'enrobée' is a Quebecer/French expression literally translated as 'coated', typically used as a 'polite' term to refer to larger individuals, especially women (with an allusion to candies that are coated with a layer of chocolate, for instance). Linda, however, likes the fact that you could be 'coated' with just about anything, including love.

not like to be defined. You know, fat defines something. (Linda, pre-photo-session conversation)

Similarly, participants referred to more subjective, looser definitions of beauty, attractiveness, health, well-being and valued inner traits. These elements were not seen as final, but as the immanent results of an ongoing quest for self-awareness, self-care and assertiveness. Presumably, this possibility of redefining the means by which one envisions the adequate/real self and the quest thereof (in an alternative manner to the Judeo-Christian mindset) presupposes the availability of discourses that allow this quest and subjective ambiguity. The therapeutic discourse seems to have given such an opportunity to several participants.

Whilst the quest for slenderness in Weight Watchers, or more generally in Western culture, does presume a form of social self-awareness, self-scrutiny and self-control (Moisio & Beruchashvili, 2010; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995), the quest for the authentic self in the therapeutic discourse values more critical social self-awareness (opening a form of suspicion/critical reflexion about the world), which seems to have enabled participants to distance themselves, at least at times, from social expectations including the worshipping of slenderness as a signifier of adequacy.

However, whilst the therapeutic discourse (and weight-loss programmes such as Weight Watchers) is associated with a rationalisation of emotions, wants and needs, which need to be 'categorised and controlled', the participants have shown an increased emphasis on the body experience, as well as on accepting emotions, desires and pleasures (instead of rationalising them).

Whilst discussing the pervasiveness of the therapeutic discourse in Western culture, Illouz (2008) also suggests that it has influenced and has been influenced by other cultural meanings, especially the feminist and the (Eastern philosophy-inspired) New Age movements. Similarly, I interpret the focus on the body as the incoming influence of a feminist therapeutic discourse, but also, perhaps, with Eastern philosophical undertones.

8.1.2. Therapeutic discourse and feminist discourse

As reminded by Joy and Venkatesh (1994), a couple of streams of feminism (including poststructuralist and women's voice/experience discussed earlier in the research framework) see the focus on the body experience as a means to dislodge the dominant rational/patriarchal discourse that has been used to oppress women:

The focus on the body is significant because of its centrality to feminist discourse. It also provides a critique of Enlightenment philosophy which emphasizes a mind-centered theory of knowledge that marginalizes the body as the chief enemy of objectivity. (Joy & Venkatesh, 1995: 334)

Accepting the body – including its desires, but also its wrongly-alleged 'flawed' nature and appearance – has become an important part of certain feminist crusades and participants' life pursuits.

Illouz (2008) makes a contentious claim that the therapeutic discourse that emerged from Freud's psychoanalytical endeavour shares common affinities and links with the feminist movement, which has heavily chastised Freudian theories as androcentric and misogynist.

From the start, and more decisively from the 1960s on, feminists drew on therapeutic discourse to make sense of women's predicaments and to devise strategies to overcome them. Second-wave feminism drew heavily on some of the basic cultural schemes of psychology to help devise strategies for women's struggles, whilst simultaneously disavowing psychoanalysis and psychology. But feminism and psychology proved to be ultimate cultural allies because they shared common schemas or basic cognitive categories ultimately derived from the social experience of women. (Illouz, 2008: 121)

Illouz (ibid) suggests the creation of new semantic linkages between both therapeutic and feminist discursive formations. Whilst Freud used the family as a central locus for development, self-understanding and problematisation, this is also echoed in feminist scrutiny of gender relations as part of familial upbringing and couple relations. The notion of 'intimacy' (which involves notions such as authenticity, individuation, and relations with others) has been identified as a common stake in both

'psy' therapeutic discourse and feminist discourse, and required disinhibition from moral hang-ups. This new focus on intimacy as the new purpose and goal of couple relationships contributed to a break away from the previous Judeo-Christian paradigm:

What had previously been viewed as a praiseworthy combination of devotion, grooming, and self-control was now viewed as an inability to develop one's own opinion and an outgoing personality – an inability that in turn, psychologists claimed, was an obstacle to reaching true intimacy. (Illouz, 2008: 116-117).

The author suggests that the women's liberation movement and therapeutic discourse share a common quest for disinhibition (especially at the sexual level) in the quest for intimacy, seen as the outcome of more equalitarian and authentic relations between partners than those fostered by the traditional moral discourse. Whilst traditional female virtues such as modesty were seen as problematic, fore hindering 'true intimacy' according to psychoanalysts, these inhibited traits were also seen by feminists as keeping women in an oppressed position. According to Illouz, the psychoanalyst focus on sexual disinhibition would even have fuelled the second wave of feminism. She further illustrates how categories such as 'true self' and 'self-esteem' have ultimately also been borrowed from the 'psy' therapeutic discourses to become important political stakes in the feminist discourse.

The author also contends that the feminist introspective/action principle of raising consciousness is also an offspring of the therapeutic realm and comes with 'the idea that self-examination could be freeing' (2008: 121). Furthermore, both therapeutic and feminist discourse 'required and instilled intense forms of reflexivity' (2008: 122). Whilst the exercise of consciousness-raising and reflexive activities are seen as tools for emancipation (including from the psychologising /scientific/masculine worldview²²), to Illouz, these very actions are seen as embedded in a process of objectification and rational scrutiny of emotions and the self inherited from the therapeutic discourse.

²²This attempt at emancipation from the rational discourse can be seen as problematic for the very attempt is imbued with a rational mindset. This problematises any attempt at 'ideological purity', which is more of a concern when evaluating my own claims to feminist approach in this research. Illouz's analysis of the therapeutic discourse highlights how, rather than fully liberating itself from the Cartesian structures, feminist research partly uses a re-articulation of this structure in its quest for liberation and social progress.

Whilst the 'psy' therapeutic discourse – influenced by and having had influenced feminism – emphasises the importance of emotions (awareness, mastery and rationalisation of emotions), it is not sufficient to make sense of some of the participants' ways of understanding and accepting the self. Some of the participants chiefly emphasise the importance of the body; not only including emotions, but also bodily experiences and abilities. Furthermore, rather than an emphasis on emotional rationalisation, a greater focus is put on body awareness and acceptance (a more instinctual way of making sense of the self and choosing behaviour). This suggests a greater influence of the feminist discourse, but, also, affinities with Eastern philosophies and their views of the embodied self and temporality.

Although feminist or religious allegiances were not a specific focus of this research, several indications in participants' accounts point to a kinship with feminist and Eastern philosophical ideas. References to feminist thoughts were sometimes made by participants, by invoking principles of gender equality, and self-esteem/negative body image being an (socially constructed) issue affecting women most particularly. Participants also discussed feminist icons such as 'Rosie the Riveter' and alluded to (feminist) advocates in the human rights movements such as Maya Angelou. More generally, however, participants invoked feminism by discussing the re-emergence of the burlesque movement and discussing the politics of pleasure and body diversity. They also discussed the role of public fashion figures such as Gok Wan (who beats the drum on the idea of beauty at every size), as well as 'feminist-inspired' marketplace campaigns advocating body diversity, such as a previous Kellogg's campaign (who have since turned their back on the idea), or the Dove 'Real Beauty' campaign.

8.1.3. Affinities with Eastern philosophies

Salient references to Eastern philosophy include the reference to books such as *'Buddhism for Mothers: A Calm Approach to Caring for Yourself and Your Children'*, and using terms such as 'Yin' to qualify images conveying a sense of inner-awareness, harmony and connectedness. This importance of accepting/acknowledging the physicality of the body, in parallel with a focus on the 'here and now' referred to by Louise, José and Elizabeth in our conversations (but also in my own account) suggests

affinities with the Eastern mindset (Erdman, 1995) which has infiltrated the Western setting in a variety of ways, including via the hippy and New Age movement in the 70s.

Askegaard and Eckhardt (2012) discuss the mixing of Eastern and Western philosophies via the adoption of yoga: a practice originating in and conveying Eastern philosophy. According to the authors, part of the appeal of yoga is its 'challenge to the fundamental Cartesian dualism of body and mind', in the context of a body appearance-control-focused 'late-modern longing for a reunification of body and mind' (Askegaard & Eckhardt, 2012: 3). As pointed out by the authors, yoga, in its contemporary (therapeutic) re-appropriation, provides an '*Eastern-inspired focus on the necessity of letting go momentarily of the direct pursuit of rational goals in order to ensure that work and life is experienced in a self-actualizing and not overdetermined mode*' (Askegaard & Eckhardt, 2012: 56).

Whilst in the Western mindset, there is one all-powerful god, and that salvation is enabled through the achievement of the sanctity of the soul (which implies bodily transcendence); in Eastern thoughts, divine principles are immanent and are the outcome of a perpetual quest for unity between the self (including the body) and divine principles (Baber (2009), referring to the work of Campbell (2007)). All in all, Eastern philosophies tend to appreciate the body and the present time as an immanent source of salvation. This resonates with some of my participants' embodied views of the self, and beliefs that adequacy, authenticity and well-being are not an 'achievement', but the immanent results of its quest.

Keeping with the comparison with Eastern philosophies, and perhaps by making an allusion to the ecological, animal rights and 'hippy' movement, several participants discussed the importance of nature in their lives, as an element that is essential and all-encompassing of their quests for well-being. 'Nature' has been deliberately introduced to the portraits and accounts of SJ, Elizabeth, Linda, Louise and José as a place for spiritual nurturance and resourcing. Another commitment to harmony with 'nature' was also discussed by Louise, who is actively taking part in animal welfare campaigns and is a long-time ideological vegetarian. This respect of nature is also claimed to be an important reason for several participants to accept, respect and care for the body as it is. Conversely, whilst respect of nature is essential

to some participants, there are also frequent allusions to the marketplace as a locus that both hinders, but also enables, their quest for well-being, authenticity and care for the self/ nature.

8.1.4. Therapeutic consumerism

The importance of marketplace campaigns (such as Dove 'Real Beauty' and Kellogg's), of marketplace public figures (such as Gok Wan and plus-size model celebrities) and the centrality of style in the process of body acceptance for the participants, does suggest affinities with the relationship that the therapeutic discourse has developed with consumerist culture. Illouz (2008) points to the strong influence of the adoption of the therapeutic discourse by mass-media such as film, the novel genre of literature, as well as women's magazines and advertising, which are commonly used as resources to fashion one's sense of style. Owing to Edward Bernays, (Freud's influential US-based nephew and father of 'public relations'), psychoanalytic themes have been adopted as a way 'to package products as bundles of meaning that could tap into the unconscious desires of consumers' (Illouz, 2008: 54). Whilst advertisers used fears and repressed sexual desires as a driver for consumption, *'commodities were also promoted in more positive ways, as having the power to help realize the hidden potentialities of the self on which psychologists were increasingly becoming the experts'*. (Illouz, 2008: 55). Thus, some of the themes used – such as self-actualisation, quest for authenticity, self-esteem and self-confidence, emotional balance, mental composure, stress relief, etc. – were also borrowed from the therapeutic persuasion.

Towards the mid-20th century, the use of style and makeup became seen as a way for women to seek the realisation of those hidden potentialities and find their 'authentic' self. Emerging identity problems – posited by an increasing number of psychologists, and promoted by a growing number of media outlets embracing the therapeutic discourse – could allegedly be resolved by a keen cosmetic industry, which used psychoanalytical theories to position its products as perfect cures for ambiguous aches. Thus, with its institutionalisation as part of consumerist society, the therapeutic discourse has contributed in shaping the notions of 'look' and 'style' as a prime arena for identity tension, actualisation and expression. This therapeutic consumerism and, at times, therapeutic feminist consumerism, such as in the case of the Dove Real

Beauty Campaign (Johnston & Taylor, 2008), is a context where individuals have the possibility to consume their ways into a process of self-actualisation and quest for self-esteem.

As seen previously, the notion of style holds a very special meaning in the identity of many of the participants, and finding the right style is seen as part of a journey towards self-actualisation. Overall, participants seem to use style (including sometimes fashion and cosmetics) as part of a journey towards self-discovery, and where the resulting looks act as a signifier of beauty/attractiveness, health/well-being and valuable inner characteristics. Importantly, whilst for some participants a personal style/look is fashioned in a dialectic relationship between a desire to be perceived as adequate/attractive by others and the need to be (or make a statement expressive of) who one 'really' is, for others, it is mostly about this notion of quest for 'authenticity' (equated with pleasure and well-being) and achievable via a process of self-awareness, assertiveness and self-care.

8.1.5. Summary: insights for the promotion of health and well-being

Whilst the moralistic views of the self (the good and the bad, the slender and the fat) are still very present in today's marketplace culture and society, the participants' accounts in this research point to alternative ways of making sense of the self, via the use of the therapeutic discourse but also via more 'embodied' perspectives such as the feminist and Eastern philosophical perspectives. As such, generally speaking, participants' quests for self-awareness, self-acceptance and wellness, suggest deep care for their bodies and an active quest for a more subjective notion of well-being.

Akin to the quest for authenticity, their views of well-being seem to be those of an ongoing quest that requires self-awareness, assertiveness and self-care and, thus, are not defined by a final (visible slender) state. More than just 'akin', however, well-being and authenticity can be seen as the manifestation in words of the same quest – in a perspective where the body is an inherent part of the self; or the self, essentially.

These results from participants' accounts, suggest that well-being/ authenticity is a central quest, accepted as ongoing, enjoyable and ambiguous in its objective.

The objective of this pursuit is not set to the achievement of an elusive final state of slenderness; the quest for which has been unsuccessful in the past and a source of sorrow. Importantly, the characteristic ambiguity, or rather, subjectivity of the object of the quest, and the ongoing nature of the process, does not predestine fuller-figured women (who can't seem to either achieve or maintain slenderness) to (moral) failure. The benefits of the quest are, again, not the outcome of displaying self-control/slenderness, but are experienced as immanent well-being and a generally rewarding feeling (from a therapeutic perspective) of being who one 'really' is.

This interpretation that:

- 1) the quest for well-being is analogous to the quest for authenticity, and in contrast with a moral quest for self-control;
- 2) the objective of the quest – well-being and authenticity – remains ambiguous in its definition and subject to personal interpretation, as opposed to being set to the achievement of a final slender state; and
- 3) the quest is accepted to be ongoing, pleasurable and both activated and experienced as a result of self-awareness for needs/desires, assertiveness and self-care.

This provides important insights for the quest for well-being and promotion of 'health'. I am aware of the implicit irony with this, given that I initially criticised consumer researchers for emitting recommendations for the well-being of consumers. However, this objection on my part can be counteracted by the fact that 1) the notion of well-being invoked emerges from the participants' perspectives (as opposed to being imposed by outsider researchers) and 2) reframing this quest (as more open and ambiguous) will have direct positive effects from an ethical perspective in visual representation and the resulting understandings of larger individuals in society.

The promotion of health relies in great part on the slender ideal and the 'medical obese' as respective signifiers for success and failure in the achievement of health. As a war on obesity intensifies, it can be argued that the more we stress the aberrance of the situation and the medical, moral and aesthetic inadequacy of larger individuals, the more we undermine their welfare, self-esteem and life chances. The idea that health could be viewed as a quest/lifestyle and that it could be achieved in different

subjective ways – and by people of different sizes, ages and levels of ability – can be seen as a shift from the dominant health orthodoxies. This shift can be seen as similar to the shift from moral to therapeutic discourse. Adopting a view of health – or rather, a broader, more subjective idea of well-being – as a quest/process with immanent experiential benefits, and with no set ideal or antagonist physical state, may help in reducing stigmatisation of larger individuals and idealisation of extreme slenderness, as well as enjoin people to take charge of the quest for their own (subjective sense of) well-being.

Of course, this shift, similarly to the therapeutic discourse (and the medical discourse), also has inherent limitations that deserve deeper scrutiny, such as the idea that the individual is responsible for her own welfare and health condition, in spite of other sociocultural contextual and economic factors. Addressing issues of access (financial and geographical) to resources that enhance well-being, such as nutritious food, health and psychological care as well as sports and leisure facilities for all (although debatable in their effects), can be seen as much more relevant as well-being enablers than launching an arsenal of body-policing measures.

It may also be argued that a fully subjective definition of health may, at times, prove to be misguided, and that an excessive focus on a quest for well-being and self-awareness is prone to render the latter quest as absorbing and potentially problematic as that of slenderness and social adequacy. This objection rests on the assumption that individuals are fundamentally ‘irrational’.

Nonetheless, I believe that this alternative perspective could limit the sense of moral failure, negative body image and appearance-based discrimination that currently constitutes an important impediment to well-being.

Even with a radical shift in health policy discourse, the persistent idea of slenderness and beauty as a locus of well-being and the real, adequate self – heavily promoted by the marketplace and ingrained in social discourse – may still sway individuals into the idea that the ‘authentic’, healthy self is necessarily a slender self. But even so, I believe a shift in the definition of health (and adequacy) that admits the experience and embodiment of individuals may be beneficial providing that it has the potential to speak to anyone/everyone, regardless of their size. In a context where immediate gratification is often perceived as a hindrance to the achievement of the

long-term finality of 'health', there might also be benefits in shifting the focus, and promoting such a quest as one that is associated with inherent (autotelic) pleasures and well-being, as opposed to relying on the promise of future (teleological) adequacy.

Finally, a similar approach could be used in the marketplace if marketers were to 'queer' or 'cloud' (make unclear and ambiguous) the signifiers/referents of health, beauty and virtues – and the associated notion of a good life – so that they can sit within the representation of people of different sizes, shapes, ages, skin colours, gender, sexual orientation and level of ability. However, queering, or clouding the definitions of the three dominant identity spheres (to be more inclusive/ambiguous in their associations) could, as a result, enjoin more individuals to take part and turn towards the market for their quest, given the new possibility that they, too, are admissible for the good life offered by marketers.

8.2 Contributions to the field of CR

The research aims of this thesis were to investigate the meanings some larger individuals give to their selves and bodies. This is an important contribution to the field of consumer research that often privileges an objectivist medical/moral model to social understanding and where larger individuals' perspectives are often marginalized or overlooked by scholars. One particularity of this research is that it brought in the perspective of women who were larger than the norm, but who were not necessarily very large; a perspective that is generally disregarded by fat studies and CR alike.

Whilst the moralistic views of the self (the good and the bad, the slender and the fat) are still very present in today's marketplace culture and society, this research points to alternative ways of making sense of the self. Participants asserted their ability to make meanings for themselves by coming up with very articulate accounts of their identities. Whilst several acknowledge the difficulties they experience at times when facing slender beauty ideals and medical norms, they come up with a wealth of positive associations for their selves and bodies which can offset feelings of inadequacy. Participants' accounts suggest that their identities and acts of consumption are far more complex than the way they are depicted in traditional CR, and that it is possible to experience self-harmony and legitimacy despite not corresponding to the marketplace norms.

Like many Western individuals, my participants have been socialised into the idea that slenderness equates moral adequacy (beauty = health = virtue) (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Thompson & Hirschman, 1998). This mindset has been thought to inform many consumers' self-perceptions and acts of consumption, whether it be food consumption, clothes selection or grooming rituals. In many cases

Whilst it is clear from their accounts that most participants still value traditional signifiers of moral adequacy – namely attractive appearance, health, and virtue (see Lupton, 1996; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Thompson & Hirschman, 1998) – they generally deconstruct, extend or alter the traditional definition of these terms. Attractive appearance, health and virtues, rather than being defined by a thin ideal become, to a greater extent, about awareness and assertiveness of either what is thought to be the authentic self or bodily experiences. This alteration of definitions comes along with

a migration from the moral discourse to the therapeutic discourse (which values the quest for authenticity), the feminist discourse (valuing the quest for authenticity but also embodied experience), and a discourse influenced by Eastern philosophy (which values the embodied experience and being in the present).

As such, some participants feel that the way to self-actualisation comes from the ability to be in touch with and express 'the real self' as opposed to conforming to external or moral expectations. The rhetoric of authenticity has been prominently used by participants to discuss appearance-related consumption; as a means of engaging in clothes, accessory and makeup selection, as well as in order to fashion their self-presentation in the context of this research. This shift in focus makes some participants especially receptive to products that can be adopted for the purpose of authentic self-expression. However, the limited offering of clothes available in larger sizes can be seen as a barrier to this pursuit and is thus either a cause for frustration, or a catalyst for DIY strategies that provide a feeling of empowerment, partial autonomy from the market, and resilience to marketplace exclusion.

Whilst the therapeutic discourse emphasises inner psychological work and the rationalisation of feelings as part of the quest for 'authenticity' and well-being (Illouz, 2008), my participants also seem to give credentials to a broader understanding of the self, which includes and gives prominence to bodily experiences. Participants use their (socially constructed) bodily experience (sensations of comfort, hunger, satiety, physical pain, pleasure, fitness and other perceived bodily desires and needs) not only as a means to guide their acts of consumption, but as a means to determine who their 'real' self is. An emphasis on these bodily experiences suggests influences from feminist discourses and Eastern philosophy. Consequently, instead of thinking about what is good (in a moral or medical sense), many participants appear to shape their consumption according to a more body-assertive and mindful view of well-being, by favouring what they see as contributing to their general feeling of wellness, or what feels good.

Whilst this research departs from traditional CR perspectives adopting an objectivist moral-medical view of fatness, it is aligned with the work of more interpretive consumer researchers adopting a more critical stance towards the moralisation and medicalization of bodies and food consumption (see for instance Askegaard, 2003,

2004; Askegaard et al., 1999; Chrysochou et al., 2010; Kristensen et al., 2013; Kristensen et al., 2011). As such, the findings from this research contribute to existing frameworks in interpretive CR concerning the ways consumers negotiate food consumption-related tensions:

Chrysochou et al. (2010) developed a 'framework of discourses and subject positions' relating to food consumption. The model encompasses the two dominant discourses of hedonism and health orthodoxies, which can be seen as creating tensions that can be negotiated with idealist and pragmatic approaches. The authors come up with four archetypal discursive positions arising from this interplay:

1. The indulgent discursive position refers to individuals who highly value the pleasures of the table, and, as such, are more experiential in their approach to food selection.
2. The controlled discursive position, conversely, refers to individuals who value health orthodoxies and thus have a health-based functional attitude to food selection.
3. The ordinary discursive position refers to individuals who are not as idealist as individuals falling into the 'indulgent' or 'controlled' categories with regards to either hedonism or health. As such, they are more 'pragmatic', implying the making of 'guilt-free compromises', or 'flexibility' between ideals and real-life situations. Whilst the ordinary archetype seeks the experiential notions of taste and pleasure, it also bases its food selection on a pragmatic 'balance between indulgence and principles towards healthy eating' (Chrysochou et al., 2010: 290).
4. The resigned discursive position, finally, refers to individuals who have a very functional attitude to food, worshipping neither ideals of 'healthism' nor 'foodism'. However, their food selection is often conducted by a 'pragmatic alternation between principles and indulgence' (2010: 290) mediated by factors such as time, money or availability, as well as one's ability to resist or succumb to 'forbidden' food.

This framework offers a schematised way of understanding the main positions people can adopt in relation to dominant food-related ideals, depending on their idealist or pragmatic propensities. As asserted by the authors, it is not meant to account for every 'compromise position' that can possibly be adopted by individuals.

They suggest the existences of perspectives that challenge health orthodoxies based on set nutritional principles, and which adhere to a view of health based on a more general sense of well-being, or 'holistic quality-of-life' (Chrysochou et al., 2010: 289).

Kristensen et al. (2013) revisit this model by adding that *'consumers increasingly turn to personal experiences and bodily feelings as the instrument and strategy for evaluating possible health risk and benefit'* (2013: 243). The authors suggest that this tendency is related to an information overload, which makes the use of structures of (bodily) feeling and embodied experiences as a more workable means to make food-related decisions. The concept of 'structures of feeling', previously discussed by Thompson (2005), suggests that ideologies and counter-ideologies can be internalised to an extent that go far beyond the cognitive realm, to become experienced emotionally. As pointed to by Thompson, *'[s]tructures of feeling create alignments between subjective experiences and ideological conditions and, thereby, coordinate social practices, modes of interactions, emotional responses, and mental habits in a profound and enduring fashion'* (Thompson 2005, 238). Kristensen et al. (2013) show how their participants use these internalised ideologies and embodied experiences in an attempt to interpret health-related advice and manage their food intake. In some cases, it appears that the internalised idealisation of slenderness accompanied by the resulting bodily feelings (or feeling about the body appearance) that it generates, are used as a means to make sense of health-related advice and inform food selection. For example, one of Kristensen et al.'s participants, Alice, vehemently dismissed public-health nutritional guidelines on the basis that it would not allow her to maintain her slender, 'healthy' figure – and worse, make her fat and 'obese' – if she was to follow them instead of her controlled diet.

In the case of my participants' accounts, there seems to be a heightened emphasis on the 'embodied experiences' as opposed to the 'feelings about the body appearance', which brings me to accentuate how I see these two concepts, not only as distinct, but as in opposition.

Whilst some of Kristensen et al. (2013) 'ordinary' and 'controlled' informants seem to rely on the way they feel about their appearance (informed by a culturally-pervasive slender ideal) to determine their food choices with a perspective of weight management, their more 'indulgent' counterparts seem to base their decisions on

embodied taste experiences by privileging refined or pleasurable flavours. Whilst a perspective based on a feeling about the appearance of the body is akin to a disembodied perspective where the body needs to be controlled by the discerning abilities/virtuous choices of the individual, the second perspective can be seen as more 'embodied' in the sense that it values experiential components such as desires and sensorial pleasures.

My participants are not wholly 'indulgent' nor 'disengaged', as would be expected with fuller-figured individuals. In most cases they value health (or well-being), yet in a way that does not conform to the 'controlled' or 'normal' pursuit of health orthodoxies. Rather than drawing upon their feelings about body appearance to determine remedial solutions, they use their embodied perspective (an awareness of their inner state of fitness, needs, desires, etc.) to guide their quests for a more holistic and experiential vision of well-being.

Thus, the participants in this research suggest an alternative discursive position – which could be labelled as 'self-nurtured' –, where experience and function are not antagonists, but fused together as per an alternative definition of health based on subjective, experiential well-being (feeling fit, feeling good, feeling happy), which emerges as a result of self-awareness, assertiveness about the body needs and self-care. Adopting a more embodied discourse, enable to recast what is otherwise seen as a 'sinful indulgence' (see for instance Kristensen et al., 2013; Moisio & Beruchashvili, 2010) as a form of 'self-nurturance' in cases where the decision to consume emerges from an awareness and assertion of needs. Shifting the meaning of what they consume, in turn, can also affect the way individuals think of their bodies and selves. For instance, in this case, consuming mindfully can give rise to a renewed sense of ownership, or agency for the consumer, as well as a perceived sense of authenticity and well-being.

The participants here show different levels of departure from the traditional Judeo-Christian discourse, towards more secular, therapeutic, feminist or Eastern-inspired discourses. Their tendency to rely on their sense of authenticity or bodily experience, can be seen as shaped culturally, even if from alternative influences. Furthermore, these discourses have, to various extents, been adopted and promoted by the market. As such, my research participants, whilst rejecting in some

ways the discursive position imposed upon them by the mainstream marketplace, are also influenced by the latter as a means to find alternative ways of making sense of the self, and see themselves as legitimate subjects. This finding is resonant with the work of Kozinets (2002), who suggests that consumers trying to escape the market still resort to the marketplace (or a market logic) in order to construct their alternative identities.

On the whole, findings from this research point to the importance, for certain individuals, of bodily feelings and embodied experience as a means to define and make sense of the self. With a few exceptions aside, such as the work of Kristensen et al. (2013), the emphasis on the bodily experience has often been missing in CR; a discipline which, in itself, tends to focus on the mind of consumers, perhaps providing its origin in psychology and its dualistic views between the mind and the body. Whilst Kristensen et al. (2013) demonstrate that consumers turn to their embodied feelings and experiences of the body as a means to guide them through their acts of consumption when facing conflicting health messages, this current research also points to the possibility to use these embodied feelings and experiences as a means to respond to market-induced feeling of inadequacy (whilst also affecting consumption in different areas such as clothing, leisure, food, etc.). This research, similarly to that of Kristensen et al. (2013), asserts the relevance of moving away from a cognitive model, and further investigating the perception and use of bodily experiences as a means to make sense of the self and inform consumption practices for a variety of consumers.

Results from this research emphasise a move of focus from appearance to more ambiguous spheres such as 'authenticity' or 'bodily experience'. Altogether, this research points to an alternative discursive possibility that can be contrasted with the cultural propensity to alter the body in order to match an envisioned ideal self that has been carved upon a cultural norm of beauty (see Schouten 1991) or the tendency to delve upon a feeling of inadequacy resulting from social comparison (discussed by Bower & Bower, 2001; Goodman et al., 2008; Halliwell & Dittmar, 2005; Martin & Kennedy, 1994; Richins, 1991). A focus on bodily experience (as oppose to appearance) logically decreases the need for appearance-based social comparison.

Participants in this research still do, however, make use of social comparison – referring to various public figures of different sizes who share similarities (physical or otherwise). But instead of using these comparisons for the purpose of self-improvement or (negative) self-evaluation, they generally reclaim images as a means to assert their dignity and legitimacy.

Importantly, this perspective also challenges and complicates the way we normally think of the identity and consumption behaviours of larger individuals in traditional CR. Whilst food consumption was deliberately not an emphasis of this research, participants' accounts suggest that food selection is far more complex than what it is understood to be by previous consumer researchers trying to solve the 'obesity crisis'. As we have seen, consumer researchers frame larger peoples' consumption as a 'failure of self-control' (Do Vale et al., 2008; Krishnamurthy & Prokopec, 2010), as a lack of will enhanced by an inclination towards high-fat food (Bolton et al., 2006), or as problematized by a perceived lack of judgement and perception (Chandon & Wansink, 2007; Aydinoglu & Krishna, 2011; Do Vale et al., 2008; Sharpe et al., 2008). Traditional CR of a transformative inclination envisions larger people as consumers who not only want but need to be saved from fatness for the sake of their own well-being. However, the results from this research show that participants use alternative ideological structures in order to shape their self-understanding and acts of consumption. Whilst this points to a potential ideological chasm or tension between consumers and researchers with a moral/medical research agenda, the situation is further complicated by the fact that relying on embodied experiences to guide consumption is highly contextual, thus jeopardising the success of any 'one size fits all' cure.

But more to the point, this research invites to a reconsideration of the definition of consumer well-being, in a more open, subjective manner. My participants, who have lived through several attempts to conform to norms and ideals, seem to have found ways to cope with their sense of self-loathing or dissatisfaction, physical and psychological discomfort and moral failure by relinquishing (albeit temporarily) this very quest for slenderness. Unlike understandings of larger consumers as either needing to be saved or as uncaring, participants' states of mind (awareness and acceptance) and practices (self-care) suggest deep care for their bodies and an active

(self-nurturing and self-fulfilling) quest for well-being. This research suggests that adopting a more 'open' or ambiguous vision of well-being might be a more encouraging way to engage people of different sizes in mindful acts of self-care and may help, by the same token contribute in decreasing appearance-related identity problems and stigma.

In summary, the primary implication of this research is that, by migrating to alternative discourses, participants have a vision of their bodies and selves that challenges current thinking in CR. The phenomenological approach undertaken in this thesis provides a unique pathway into the embodied experience of fuller-figured individuals. By privileging their voice and their perspectives, we are able to gain new insights into consumer behaviour that transcends the dominant positivist perspectives in CR. Generally speaking, giving more importance to the body experience as researchers can provide a way to highlight alternative discourses available and used by consumers as a means to make sense of the self and interact with the market. This research also suggests that, a greater understanding of the discursive position of individuals can potentially prove more fruitful and avoid wasted effort to cure a consumer problem that might not be completely so.

In the next section, I will be addressing the insights from this research in terms of ethics in representation of consumers or marginalised groups, both in the marketplace and within our research practices. As such, these also provide for important contributions to the field of CR by adding to the body of literature on ethics in visual representation and (feminist) research epistemologies.

8.3. Return on the research process and ethics in representation

In the Literature Review, I highlighted how the typical visual representation of fat/fuller-figured individuals can be seen as being embedded in ethical issues. Current images idealising slenderness, othering fatness and beheading larger individuals as part of a paradigm of faceism and process of erasure, contribute to understandings of larger individuals that are epistemically closed and contrived by stereotypes.

Self-portraiture, or self-directed portraiture (combined with other modes of data collection), though very rarely used to my knowledge in CR, allowed my participants to express themselves as subjects in the context of this research. The selection of self-directed portraits as part of the data collection method was meant to enable the emergence of additional forms of insights based on the experience, understanding and staging of the body-self by fuller-figured women. This was done with the intent of redressing a gap in traditional consumer research, where the understanding of larger individuals is typically limited to the presumption of problematic consumption and negative self/body affects. This was also intended to enrich the realm of (market-related) visual depictions, by integrating self-directed portraits by and of people for whom the body has typically been problematised, erased, or 'hijacked as a commodity' (Joy & Venkatesh, 1994).

However, we need to ask whether the portraits on their own are truly as effective as they could be in conveying the subjectivity/complexity/humanity of the people they feature, especially in the context of a research. Are they effective enough to keep the audience from falling into the trap of epistemic closure; that is, of simplifying their reading of others in accordance with their pre-existing typecast views? Despite my initial celebratory enthusiasm for this project, I realised it would take more than a variety of 'lovely' self-directed depictions of larger women to contribute in remedying the situation. It is part of the solution, but it is perhaps not enough.

During the past few years that I have been involved in this thesis project, visual social media has become a platform for a greater proliferation of photo-based campaigns, projects and collections designed to enhance diversity- and self-

acceptance, as well as change perceptions. These have sometimes been used by artists or politically-inclined individuals, including scholars, to show alternative identities, or to show the 'truth' obscured by marketplace normativity (women revealing their post-pregnancy bodies (Jackson, 2014) or the effects of chemotherapy/mastectomy (Evans, 2014) on their bodies; women in non-traditional gender roles (Perez, 2014); centenarian bodies (Pottinger, 2014), people ascribing to different cisgender or transgender identities, sexual orientations, or ethnical identities, as a few examples). These self-acceptance and diversity promotion campaigns have also been used to make a corporate statement (similar to Dove) in order to create a differentiated – 'more humane' – positioning, and generate a lucrative buzz (retailers using 'normal' women, female PhD students (Betabrand, 2014) or individuals with a visible physical impairment as models (Driscoll, 2013), for instance).

Given my great interest in body diversity, identity politics and photo-based projects, these campaigns were repeatedly sent to me by people in my network. I realised, with this increased exposure, that some of these campaigns commanded much more attention and empathy on my part than others. This was not because I was not interested in the 'cause' of those less-engaging campaigns. Despite appreciating the diversity and disruption of norms as a nice feature of those numerous 'less-involving' campaigns, I felt I wasn't learning much from those portraits (aside from the fact that people come in different forms – ha!). Moreover, my typical way of reading images, which ranges from aesthetic appreciation, feminist discourse analysis (often bordering the 'rant') or rudimentary semiotic analysis depending on the situation, generally prevailed and often culminated in some form of epistemic closure about the person depicted. This epistemic closure arose because the intent and traces of the human complexity of the people depicted were left out. Conversely, some projects seemed much more involving when they offered more clues within the image itself, or as an accompanying text about the intention of the author-sitter.

For instance, as I was finishing the interpretation for this research project, I came across the images of another research project called '*(1)ne Drop: Shifting the Lens on Race*' (Blay, 2014). This collaborative project between Dr. Yaba Blay and a team of photographers aimed to challenge the set definition of blackness based on the 'one drop rule'. To do so, they invited individuals who considered themselves to be

part of the 'racial, cultural, and social group generally referred to and known as "Black"' to take part in a portraiture session and give a verbal account of how they self-identify. The resulting images featured a wide range of individuals with varying skin-tones, in what appears to be happenstance, daily-life-like settings for the most part. Beyond the sheer diversity and aesthetic beauty of the images, what stood the (1)ne Drop project (as well as the 'Mirrors' project, and this thesis project) apart from other online photo galleries designed to disrupt people's understandings of identities, was the fact that the photos were accompanied by the voice of the people who were depicted. Whether it was more details about how these people envision themselves, or the intent behind the portraits, their voices gave the opportunity to inform and thus enrich the interpretation of the images beyond a pure semiotic interpretation.

This troublesome realisation that, in general, only few details about the author/sitter's intentions are being conveyed with, or as part of, portraits seems to be symptomatic of the standing belief in an 'intentional fallacy' (an undue and misleading focus on the intention of the author) discussed in literature on visual analysis. As asserted by Gillian Rose, '*most of the recent work on visual matters is uninterested in the intentionality of an image's maker*' (Rose, 2012: 26), (which, in self-portraits is the sitter). She points to three types of argument in favour of a 'neglect' of the author's intention or perspective in visual research (this is related to what she sees as three sites of investigation of an image: the 'production', the 'image' itself and the 'audience'):

Production: Though the author's intent can be seen as part of the site of production, some critics point to the greater impact of other – sometimes less intentional – aspects of the image production, such as the image composition.

Image: To other opponents who seem to see the image in itself as their main site of interest, meanings can be considered as sitting first and foremost within that extended visual context because images can be seen as 'intertextual' – always created and understood in relation to other texts or images.

Audience: Finally, other critics consider the audience who 'consume' the image as the most relevant source of meaning-making of an image and, as such, prefer various

audience readings informed by their own background and perspectives, as opposed to the perspective of the author.

Whilst consumer researchers have paid attention to existing advertising images, they have generally focused on the site of the image, (via discourse or semiotic analysis) or the site of the audience interpretation. The site of production is nowadays often dismissed as a source of 'intentional fallacy'. Arguably, – in a context of ethics in visual representation – the reported intention (generally a corporate entity) of the image's author can be seen as being of lesser importance than the potentially damaging ideas and meanings (even if unintentionally) conveyed by the said image. Typical marketplace-generated images of larger individuals can easily be criticised by looking at the resulting image alone, or their reception by the audience. But what about self-portraits? And what about self-portraits of traditionally misrepresented or underrepresented individuals?

The fact that many individuals do not (or did not, prior to the emergence of social media) have access to the means of image production renders that sphere of image authorship of particular political salience. Just like in this feminist research, there is a reason to believe that the authorial roles played by the participants in the production of their portraits can be crucial as part of the agenda of integrating them in the dialogue. Yet, since authorial intention in visual (and often research) representation is generally dismissed and interpreted as an 'intentional fallacy', it points to a risk to further silence the important perspective of the subject behind/in those images. This is more so in a context where the participants are not professional image-makers, which implies a risk of discrepancy between their intention and actual portraits. As discussed in the methodological approach, the involvement of a professional photographer was intended to bridge this level of competency, to enable them to create the best possible output. Likewise, the involvement of an outside photographer who would try to actualise their vision required the participants to be explicit about their intentions and visions. It also made these elements particularly important as part of the research process.

Whilst too much focus on the perspectives of individuals as intentional agents can (unduly) suggest autonomy from the pervasive ideological structures of interpretation at play, I believe there is still relevance in paying attention to the intention

of the individuals – not only to include them as part of our high-level theories but especially to avoid glossing over their human complexity.

Providing more details about the subjectivity (or authorship) of the sitter can give the opportunity for deeper and more empathetic (or sympathetic) readings of that individual, and thus help challenge epistemically-closed readings by taking into account her (authorial) perspective. Overall, emphasising this authorial intention/subjectivity of sitters in visual accounts (or participants in research accounts) opens the possibility for the readers to enhance their interpretation in light of the voice of the sitter/author, and, possibly, defer or detract epistemic closure.

Though I argue that the author's intention is important, especially in the context of self-portraits, we should not 'close' our reading of participants' intentions if the goal is to gain a greater understanding of the structures at play, shaping the depicted individuals. I see author's intentions in self-portraits as an additional, and too often unduly dismissed, layer of information that can enhance our understanding of the person thus depicted.

Authorial decisions can take multiple forms and can manifest themselves in elements used by the participants to translate their bodies/selves into images for the purpose of social interaction. These may include elements such as verbal captions, positions and expressions, contexts, *mise en scène* (setting, lighting, costume and staging), narratives, framing and props. It is not so much the content of the authorial decisions themselves (the discourses or signs invoked) that is important. Rather, it is the fact that these depictions are of and from 'real', complex individuals instead of being scripted by traditional image-makers.

8.3.1. (Re)turn to participants' authorial intentions and decisions

In the context of this research, I asked participants to self-direct their portraits and I collected information relevant to the site of production (participants' intents/visions and reviews of their own images, which were necessary to guide the photographer, but also to enable me to assess the extent to which they have actualised their vision²³); the site of the image (the images themselves, which could be seen as the locus of a

²³ This was thought to be the more relevant where the participants – though very familiar with codes of representations – are not professional image-makers or models.

semiotic or discourse analysis); and the site of the audience (group review of the participants' photos, which enabled me to assess the receptivity of an audience of fuller-figured women themselves).

Though I investigated participants' interpretations of existing representations, and the group's portraits (as an audience), it was not my intention to investigate other people's interpretation of these images, even though CR tends to favour this approach. Whilst the reliance on a discourse or semiotic analysis seemed almost 'predestined' given the visual nature of the data collected, I realised that my interpretation should not solely rely on the sphere of the image but also, very importantly, on the sphere of production. As such, I reemphasise the importance of the authorial decisions of the participants as a site of meaning-creation (and a valid source of insight).

Many authorial decisions have been exposed in the participants' presentation and interpretation section. My intention in the following section is to reemphasise, by returning to some of the participants' portraits and accounts, how keeping in mind some of these authorial decisions can provide for alternative readings of the images, and contribute to the subjectification of individuals (even if this is not always apparent in photos).

Arguably, camera shot distance – *'how much of a figure is shown by a particular shot'* (Rose, 2012: 69) – and angles are important elements in the composition of an image and creation of meaning. They can be seen as devices used to convey quite specific meanings about the subject pictured, or to imply certain positions or roles of the 'reader' in relation to the subject depicted.

In this project, camera shot distances and angles were determined as part of an interplay between the participants²⁴ and the photographer. However, participants were in charge of the final image selection.

²⁴ Some participants were very specific or had special requests in terms of framing. For instance, Louise and Sarah drew concepts that included their full body, and SJ was insistent on showing a full long skirt. Michaela and SJ also asked for specific angles (low angle shots – looking up at the subject), or 'implied' them with the choice of their settings (for example José, who chose to be depicted in a staircase (again, from a low angle shot). Some others did not seem so concerned about the angle or framing in the planning of their session. However, the photographer generally used a variety of shots and angles during the photo session, so that participants would then be free to select the ones they preferred.

What do the different framing decisions imply for the representation of the participants? The trickiness of the question becomes more evident in light of the various possible alternatives that could have been selected.

With regards to the camera shot distance, we need to consider the possibility that participants could have opted for a traditional headless shot (close-up on the body without the head) as per traditional representations of larger individuals in the context of the 'obesity epidemic'. Though no one decided to opt for this focus on the full body with exception of the head, it could have been made as a self-derogatory or satirical statement. Participants generally had their faces featured in their portraits, and used a wide range of facial expressions that suggested states of bliss, happiness, cheekiness, concentration, love, pride, fear, enjoyment, flirtatiousness, etc. The decision to reveal, and the revealing of these inner traits (as opposed to blank looks), can be seen as one way of asserting the subjectivity of the participants.

Whilst there were several close-ups on the head/face (sometimes with shoulders/bust) selected, participants did not specifically ask for a depiction of their faces only. A few exceptions aside, the body seemed to have been considered by the participants as an important element of the portrait; challenging, to a certain extent, the perceived duality between the body and the mind/face. For instance, José did not want to see her body split in two. She indicated preferring the photos where she is 'complete'. For Sarah, Elizabeth and me, featuring our full bodies whilst dancing, or swimming, was not only deliberate, but used to acknowledge the precious role of our bodies in performing/enabling us to experience those activities associated with pleasure, wellness and embodied passion.

Whilst some have expressed ambivalence about the appearance of their bodies (sometimes because of the size or shape, but also because of marks, scars or signs of ageing), we all seemed to appreciate our bodies as an important and characteristic part of our selves (not just the face, and not just for decorative purposes). Though the representation of full female bodies can be seen as detrimental to their understanding as complex, thinking individuals according to a typical semiotic/discourse analysis, the representation of full bodies in this context – keeping in mind the voices of the authors – can be seen in an alternative manner here. Paying attention to their intentions and visions for their self-directed portraiture points to alternative reading where the body

is represented as animated, as an experience, as a capacity, and importantly, as the self. It suggests a subversive (feminist) affect towards the body, instead of self-objectification in the feminist sense.

It could be argued that some of the depictions – to the extent that they emulate (deliberately or not) some of the traditionally objectifying female representations – could be associated with a degree of (self-)objectification. However, this does not absolutely eclipse the subjectivity of these participants. Because participants were in control of their self-presentation, it was possible for them to emphasise aspects they considered made up for a representative, ideal, and/or flattering depiction of their self in their current embodied state (such as curves, facial features, breasts, buttocks, hair, etc.). Participants generally embraced taking part in a photo session in which they were free to express themselves, play and indulge in their fantasy representation. Creating an image that ‘spoke’ beauty and sexiness was something sought by several participants, and was said to be associated with pleasure, pride and empowerment. Though there are many debates amongst different strands of feminists about the role and adequacy of beauty and sexiness for feminist political progress, it can be argued that *‘[i]nsofar as the images illustrate activities that satisfy or heighten their desires, their subjectivity is being recognised’* (Freeland, 2010: 234).

Furthermore, whilst the codes used by Michaela (who emulated a magazine depiction) can be reminiscent of the depiction of women as sex objects, it is important to contextualise the photos with her intent. Her idea to show that fuller-figured women could be just as attractive as slender ones – given the same attention or adopting the same codes – had some very personal, and political undertones (translating a desire to see things change). Freeland suggests that certain types of objectification, as are present in Michaela’s case, can have democratising effects, and contribute to offsetting the unequivocal idealisation of a limited range of female bodies (idealisation being one of the ethical problems highlighted by Schroeder and Borgerson, 2005). Fat studies scholar Owen (2010), who builds upon Butler (1990) in her interpretation of BBW (big, beautiful woman) Club goers, suggests that *‘performing in sexy drag encourages “spectators” to challenge the stable and exclusive constructions of sexiness that normally reject fatness. As a result, fat women embodying a sexiness*

usually linked to thin, passive bodies do not reinforce but deconstruct feminine sexiness' (2010).

As it was planned at the onset of the photo project, participants were given the opportunity to have some 'Photoshop' treatment done – which, in a sense, leads us into the territory of idealisation of physical perfection. All participants but one declined this opportunity, considering that the marketplace (and this photo project) should present 'real' unaltered bodies; authentic living bodies endowed with 'flaws' (in the Photoshop sense), which can also be seen by participants as valuable accounts of real 'selves' and life histories. As pointed out by Louise:

But these pictures are all about celebrating who we are and all of them have been incredibly beautiful. They've all been... I mean, I would be thrilled to see them in magazines. Because they are of proper women, with delicious curves... it's not about skinny... I mean, I don't understand the point of this... (...) these are stunning! All of them are stunning! Photoshopping would be offensive I think... (Louise, group review)

However, Michaela, SJ and I mused with the idea of (and in the case of Michaela, opted to use) Photoshop in an attempt to be on par with the marketplace representation of normatively-sized models. In this sense, similar to the case of sexual objectification described above, Photoshop was contemplated and used to make a statement that fuller-figured women could appear just as convincingly beautiful given the use of a similar touch-up arsenal. Participants' accounts suggest that creating aesthetically equivalent images, using 'the same modes', was meant to be used as 'a fair chance' – a chance that is typically (deliberately or not) denied to larger individuals, who remain absent from representations of 'beauty' in the mainstream visual culture arena.

A case of aesthetic objectification (using the body as a medium for aesthetic value) could also be pointed out with SJ, who went for a rather contrived 'couture' image. However – and as it was the case for Michaela who showed a completely different facet in a different photo shoot – SJ's role as a subject was partly asserted by the more personal depictions of herself as imps, juxtaposed on the main image. If anything, the very point of SJ's montage was to highlight that there is more than meets

the eye; that there is a very complex person under the 'constructed' outside image. Several participants suggested the challenge they experienced when trying to convey different facets of themselves in a coherent portrait. Aside from the case of SJ's montage, which gives different facets all at once, it was, as argued by Freeland (2010), generally necessary to look at the different portraits (and I add participants' conversations about their intents, in the context of this research) of the same person to have a more holistic perspective of their inner character, or subjectivity.

The practice of closing-up on body parts such as breasts, buttocks, legs, shoulders, neck, in photography and painting, has been traditionally associated with sexually objectifying undertones, depending on the intent of the artist. Le'a Kent (2001), whose work has been discussed in the introduction of this thesis, criticises the fact that the February 1995 Life magazine issue on 'Fat' focused, in great part, on fragments of fat individuals, thus erasing their wholeness and human subjectivity.

However, as demonstrated by the participants, the body, or focus on body parts, is not necessarily objectifying and can be made to convey some subversive affect, but also, a lot of subjectivity. For instance, Louise requested to have a few close-up photos of her hands, which left her facial expression completely out of the picture. This can be paralleled with Freeland's discussion of the hands portraits of Georgia O'Keefe made by her partner, Alfred Stieglitz, as an exemplary case of the subjectivity involved in certain cases of body fragmentation. Instead of an undifferentiated body part, O'Keefe's hands are especially meaningful for they are particularly cherished by the depicted individual, and associated to her own status as an artist. Similarly, by giving special attention to her hands and forearms (adorned with her characteristic rings and tattoos), Louise manifested their importance in her life, given her love of craftmaking and embracing of the 'make do and mend' spirit. They suggest a whimsical, creative and resourceful subjectivity, and are, as well, to Louise, a bodily reminder of her beloved mother: '*I find these slightly moving, you know. That one I love, 9670, the close-up on the hand is beautiful*' (Louise, photo review). This suggests that Louise's subjectivity, similarly to other participants, can be conveyed right to her fingertips.

As such, even if the focus on body parts or the complete female body can be used as a means to objectify the individuals depicted in traditional analysis, they can,

when considering more carefully the participants' intent/experience, be a means to rehumanise individuals, once infused with their 'real' life subjectivity or 'air'. This is true of participants manifesting forms of affects with various parts of their bodies, not just for their looks, but for their expressive and experiential abilities, as well as these parts being infused with memory and history (age, reminder of mother). The body is not just a generic 'clothes hanger'... its singularity, history, experience and expressive power are valued, (yet entirely neglected in the design of clothes for fuller-figured individuals, and, some would say, clothes at all).

Objectification is arguably widespread in marketplace representation, if only to the extent that models (or non-models such as fat individuals) are there to sell a product, and thus can be seen as 'means' to reach an end. If the issue of objectification is hard to overcome, participants' discussions suggest that the representing of individuals in a more subjectified manner could be both beneficial to them and the marketplace. Whilst I am wary, as a feminist, to suggest that objectification is an acceptable practice in marketplace representation, some participants' accounts suggest that the inclusion of body diversity (whilst borrowing conventional codes from the image-makers that can involve a certain degree of objectification) could have a positive appeal and effect on them by offsetting the idealisation of a narrow type of bodies. However, participants' perspectives and take on the portraiture point to a few important considerations that increase the challenges for marketers: the representation of the individual does not need to be at the expense of the expression of their own desire (which can be seen as an important feminist criteria) or of their own personality, and should be considered amongst a wider range of representations that assert the multifarious/complex subjectivities of the individuals involved. These notions of experience of desire, expression of personality as well as multifariousness come across as important elements in participants' self-presentations. It seems important to privilege ways of asserting subjectivity in all other possible manners, including by drawing attention to the intention/experience/humanity of the person depicted.

Authorial decisions pointing to participants' subjectification

Depicted for their own sake (as ends versus means)

The intention with the portraits was, overall, to depict the participants as subjects; as 'ends' versus 'means', which is an important criterion for subjectification in portraits according to Freeland (2010). This was further asserted where, for participants, the intent of the self-directed portrait was generally to depict the self as 'authentically' or as 'faithfully to one's tastes' as possible (which could refer to one's ideal self). Depictions were often created in order to offer a glimpse into the participants' universe, or, as Louise puts it, 'offer a gatefold view of who I am' (conversation). The experience of portraiture was often an 'autotelic' projection and experience of the self, in and of itself.

This was demonstrated with the use of lighting and colours; authorial decisions made by participants, not so much to elicit a certain idea in the mind of the audience, but, rather, to express certain inner traits and experiences, and as a source of pleasure in and of itself. For instance, Louise used a wide variety of saturated colours to suggest that she 'live[s] over a rainbow', to refer to her visceral passion for colours, flowers and tattoo ink. The deliberate use of natural light by Elizabeth and José, and by Linda in some of her outdoors pictures, was to emphasise their desire to be perceived naturally, in an 'authentic' manner, 'in real life', as well as congruous with their desire to be portrayed in the sunshine/outdoors (elements Linda and Elizabeth particularly love, and that make them happy).

This can be contrasted with Linda's use of colours in her workshop (but also Sarah with her boudoir photo, and SJ in her derelict environment), where the lighting is subdued and suggests a privileged access to an intimate moment/space. In SJ and Sarah's case, the shadows were used to strategically enhance the body shapes to their likings and create an aura of mystery. Colours (teal, red, purple) were also picked to complement loved features (such as eyes, skin, hair, etc.), as well as to reflect their tastes and desires/passions.

Whilst all participants reported having enjoyed the photo session experience, viewing it as an opportunity to express themselves and indulge in a fanciful exercise, some participants made this experience a particular focus in their self-presentation. Examples of this can be seen with Elizabeth who is portrayed as if she is 'letting go' and dancing; with Louise, who is having a play with some cherished objects, referring to her passion and loved ones; with Laura, who is enjoying a drink, party food and a

cigarette (this is 'me'); or with Linda, who is walking us around her home and studio, as she is expressing her passion for arts, and love for meaningful people in her life. These participants seemed to seek the creation of a portraiture that is more happenstance, where the body-self is left to 'express itself', in a 'free' and enjoyable way. As such, Louise, Elizabeth, Linda, José and Laura were not just using agreed semiotic codes to elicit certain ideas in the minds of the viewer. Rather, they used these elements (such as flowers, toys, art pieces, colours, cigarettes, foods) in an 'autotelic' manner, as part of their embodied affects, desires, tastes, relationships and experiences; as part of their identity. They all explicitly emphasised that these self-directed portraits (especially certain ones) were effectively 'who they are', often using the expression 'this is me' (Laura, Elizabeth, Louise).

In other cases, particularly with SJ, Sarah, Michaela and me, the at times more curated body depictions (with pre-existing fashion codes) were not just props meant to sell something else, but they were staged as such to express something about the experience, desires and aspirations of the person behind them. This can generally be contrasted with the understanding of individuals as 'means' or objects whose sole purpose is to fulfil the sexual fancy of an outside viewer, or as an object that represents fear, apathy, blame, disgust or laughter. With regards to the latter, SJ and Michaela explicitly expressed their desire to steer away from any representations in which they would be depicted as an object of humour.

Depicted as unique and irreplaceable

Whereas larger individuals are often represented in a generic manner (without human character in the case of the 'headless fatty' and in a rather standardised way in the case of the 'plus-size' model), the limited sample of participants have managed to create a rich variety of depictions for themselves. This points to their differences in terms of look, and also to their individuation in terms of intents, character and self-understandings. Participants seemed to perceive and emphasise their distinctiveness, not necessarily as a result of their weight/size – though some seem to consider it as part of their 'essence' – but by virtue of many other characteristic elements, including inner traits, experiences and many other outer body features that they decided to set forth in the portrait. These emphasised distinctive elements were not always sources

of loathing (as it can be presumed in current marketplace/research discourse), but, rather, sources of positive attachment.

Depicted as autonomous and sovereign

Unlike clichés of the larger individual as ‘impotent’, ‘idiot’, ‘mindless’ or ‘victim’, participants have chosen to be represented in a variety of ways that assert their agency and capacity for self-governance and self-determination (again, this is in light of an understanding that these are also shaped by the structures). Furthermore, whilst it seems to be believed that larger individuals, as a category, can be ‘owned’ (for instance, by the state, as subjects to its scrutiny, discrimination and rehabilitation measures), or morally/aesthetically devalued, participants’ depictions appeared in sharp contrast. SJ asserted her sovereignty by deciding to present herself as ‘inaccessible’ in her ‘couture look’, whereas Sarah, to give another example, placed great emphasis on self-ownership in her burlesque depiction, suggesting that the viewer can’t have her even if they had wanted to. Laura, José, Elizabeth, Linda and Louise’s depictions also showed free-spirited individuals following their own desires, as opposed to individuals who are subordinated or domesticated.

Depicted as having boundaries

Freeland discusses how the fact of being portrayed with a respect of boundaries contributes to a ‘subjectifying’ depiction; which partly refers to the respect of the dignity and intimacy of the subject. Conventional depictions of larger individuals can be interpreted as a form of voyeuristic picture, taken without the consent or awareness of the person represented. The fact that they are anonymised (beheaded) further suggests our lack of entitlement to see these photos in the first place. Conversely, participants’ endorsement of their self-directed portraits is asserted by their willingness to have their names associated with their pictures and this research. Furthermore, participants are aware of their involvement in a portrait, and are posing with the awareness that the resulting photos will be accessible to strangers.

In general, participants conceptualised and selected images that made them feel comfortable, proud and happy, or conforming to what they perceived as their ‘authentic’ self. This is what I hoped would happen with a self-directed portraiture, but it could have been otherwise, especially considering the pervasive negative discourse

about fuller-figuredness. As such, participants generally conceptualised images that were respectful to what they perceived as their boundaries. Some participants decided to get out of their comfort zone in order to make a statement.

The objective of making a statement was prevalent amongst several participants who wanted to emphasise the value and adequacy, not just for themselves, but for people of various shape and sizes. Participants used their depictions as statements of beauty, elegance, attractiveness, health, fitness and activeness, but also human fragility, complexity and so forth. A couple of participants discussed the possibility of posing nude, in order to reveal their bodies and make a statement about self-love and self-acceptance, but then decided against it – to respect their boundaries.

SJ decided to make a statement of self-acceptance by showing the hidden, more vulnerable sides of herself in a visually poetic manner. She also suggested that although she would have liked to use Photoshop retouching in order to be on par with current fashion models, she decided against it to make a statement about the legitimacy of natural bodies and un-retouched body representations. In this sense SJ pushed her boundaries, but within acceptable limits. Similarly, to Michaela, posing in lingerie, or to me, posing in a bathing suit, was something that was slightly pushing our comfort zone/boundaries. For several of us, the initial confrontation to modesty, or self-consciousness, was seen as a necessary ‘discomfort’ to create the types of images we feel we should have been exposed to as young women.

Depicted as alive and active

Being depicted as alive and active, as opposed to inert, is another criteria that contributes to achieving ‘subjectification’ in a portrait, according to Freeland (2010). Participants emphasised these elements in their representations. Elizabeth, for instance, mentioned wanting to look ‘alive’, ‘active’ and ‘enjoying life’, and self-directed a portrait where she is dancing and visibly enjoying the moment. Similarly, some participants wanted to be represented as healthy, which can be contrasted with the traditional depiction of larger individuals as signifiers of disease, let alone with the autopsy-style images used to allude to the deadliness of ‘obesity’ (Kent 2001). Finally, participants’ resulting images and discourses were also at odds with the typecasting

of fuller individuals as lazy or as absent-minded. This was further asserted by the fact that the participants actively got involved in the production of their portraits.

Summary of participants' authorial decisions

Whilst I adopt a view that *'individual selves and intentions are functions of social and cultural practices'* (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011:237), as part of this research, more generally, I also believe that the sole focus on sociocultural conventions can lead us to forget the human/embodied characteristic (though clearly socially constructed) of the person who is depicted in the portrait, something that is required to avoid slipping into epistemically-closed readings of individuals. Looking at the site of production and authorship in the context of self-portraits or self-directed portraits – perhaps whilst acknowledging the dialectic nature of the relationship between the structure and the individuals' intentions – is a prime way to bring the voice of the forgotten subject back into the dialogue of research and visual representation. Emphasising the authorial decisions and intentions of sitters as a means to enlighten our understanding of the portraits can also act as a way of disrupting our reading habits and remembering that behind the portrait, there is a human sitter who translated herself into an image for public interaction.

8.3.2. Keeping the human traces within the research project (reflexivity)

Finally, Freeland's framework for subjectification (2010) also brings me to reflect on my research approach and to reemphasise considerations to take into account when conducting research aimed at participants' subjectification:

'End versus means'

The depiction of individuals as ends versus means is very relevant to our way of representing research subjects in our outputs. Using the participant as a means – of illustrating or confirming theories, or advancing knowledge that has little relevance to their existence for instance – can be seen as a common practice in research, and perhaps with a special emphasis in traditional marketing-related research. However, involving participants in the dialogue of research and, thus, in the shaping of meaningful theories to a field of research such as CR, can serve as a means to give value/legitimacy to their voice, as well as a means to offset traditional theories that

serve to objectify them. To conform to feminist epistemological principles, involving participants in the dialogue of research presupposes a prior alignment with the interests of the research participants. This, of course, may become more problematic if participants seem to have anti-feminist interests, discourses or seek self-objectifying depictions. Nevertheless, paying more attention to participants' intentions may point to goals or issues that may be of relevance to feminist research and politics, and should deserve more than castigation or dismissal as false consciousness.

Admittedly, what I envisioned as participants' interests or concerns in this research actually stemmed from my own experiences and feelings of being misrepresented or absent in the marketplace of visual culture. Though this constitutes an important bias and requires caution in the interpretation of these results, I believe my presumption was confirmed (or self-fulfilled?) as participants' accounts indicated that they felt strongly about the idea of having their portraits done to broaden the scope of depictions of larger individuals. This research was also intrinsically concerned about participants' perspectives in the sense that I opted for a problematic that sought to address the way fuller-figured individuals want to be represented. This being said, I still consider as a feminist research ideal the concept of involving the participants in the definition of what constitutes their interests.

'Unique and irreplaceable'

The notion of 'unicity and irreplaceability' in research is often subsumed to the necessity to generalise findings to the wider population, or to categorise informants. In order to favour the subjectivity/subjectification of participants, it is important to also account for differences that offer challenges to models and categorisation. Though I am 'guilty' of having conducted research involving fuller-figuredness and femaleness as selection criterion (and the more so with the bias of choosing assertive women specifically), I come to the conclusion that fuller-figured women cannot be seen as one category of individuals.

I thus think it is important, as a researcher, to maintain these differences amongst individuals, perhaps arising from individual or cross-sectional characteristics other than those used as a means to select them. This is of particular relevance to other research studies involving 'members of groups' such as those based on disability, ethnicities, sexual orientation and so forth. Instead of contributing to the

creations of epistemically-closed understandings of individuals with shared characteristics, this should help to assert the variety of subjectivities that they can embody. Freeland's framework brings me to suggest that the condition of irreplaceability could be better met by asserting the distinctiveness of the participants, and the impact of this distinctiveness on the results, as opposed to camouflaging these differences under well-constructed categories. This is in line with Hogg et al.'s (2000) argument in favour of 'messy' research accounts as part of a feminist research approach.

The decision to associate the names and images of the participants to this research was perhaps unorthodox, but fit for rehumanising the representation of participants. I believe this also helped emphasise the unicity and irreplaceability of these participants. Of course, the decision to anonymise might have been better suited, or indeed necessary, in most other research studies (especially those targeting a contribution at a more macro level), but perhaps, it should not be assumed that anonymity is favourable to visibility and ownership for participants. Similarly, before taking the conventional decision of anonymising research, it may be perhaps relevant to question to what extent our representation may infringe the participants' dignity in the first place, and therefore find ways to reinstate this dignity in our research account, instead of relying blindly on the cover of anonymity. After all, because it is advisable to share research with participants from a feminist perspective, it is important to consider to which point our account may affect them, regardless of whether they can be recognised by an external observer.

This brings me to discuss the criteria of respecting participants' boundaries, and making sure an account does not infringe on their intimacy or personal comfort zone. The fact that some participants in this research have decided to push their boundaries to make a statement needs not be confused with a right to infringe participants' boundaries to make a similar statement of our own. I have experienced this, particularly with the notion of what can be said without infringing the dignity and legitimacy of the participants. This was a delicate endeavour that I tried to undertake by involving participants in interpretations and checks, where possible, as well as by reflexively engaging with this research. I also believe that my own involvement in the

project has had the benefit of keeping me in line, to a certain extent, by 'subjecting' myself and my accounts to a similar treatment to that of the participants.

Caring for participants' dignity should be considered a priority but is also all the more difficult once a researcher has cumulated a vast quantity of data, sometimes of a very personal nature. In the same way as the artist referred to by Freeland, I believe the researcher should 'remain at a respectful distance from the thoughts' (Freeland 2010: 208) of the person depicted to ensure their dignity (as well as to ensure the security of very personal data).

'Autonomous and sovereign' (or legitimate)

Perhaps the lack of autonomy and sovereignty is especially prevalent in research dealing with the topic of 'obesity' in CR. In those research studies where the participant is either portrayed as a victim, someone who is engaging in mindless acts of consumption or lacking self-discipline, there is very little emphasis on participants' agency and self-interpretation, let alone if they value the ideological discourses and constructs (such as the Judeo-Christian virtue of self-discipline) that are meaningful to the researchers. Again, this is not to suggest that participants are completely emancipated from the ideological structure. Rather, participants' alternative discursive positions may render attempts at transformative (consumer) liberation (by researchers and authorities) futile for being irrelevant to one's ideological priorities and vision.

In an attempt to encourage representation of participants as 'autonomous, sovereign and legitimate' (for the sake of their subjectification in representation, as opposed to developing macro-theories), I would argue that considering the participant as (legitimate) experts in their own lives – but also, giving emphasis to the meaning-making ability of the participants in the first place – could contribute to breaking their representation as wholly disempowered or dependent on researchers to solve their 'problems'. Of course, asserting the meaning-making abilities of individuals does not exclude the notion that they can be affected or oppressed by structures in daily life; it will, however, avoid the suggestion that nothing can be done, that nothing has been done by these individuals, and that all is to be done by the researcher as hero (Bettany, 2007). As shown in the context of this research, the researcher should not be seen as the only one endowed with lucidity, whereas participants can be extremely conscious of the influence of structures.

Furthermore, the common practice of researchers seeing participants and their accounts as data 'owned' by the expert researcher, and thus being available as a 'means' to achieve their theoretical advances, can also be seen as problematic, and brings me to reiterate the importance of striving for more reciprocal, mutually beneficial relations with them. This points, again, to the importance of conducting research that is meaningful and relevant to the participants, and to the necessity of seeing them as legitimate expert collaborators instead of ill-advised objects of research.

'Alive and active'

The criteria of representing the participants as alive and active brings me to point to the relevance of addressing expression and experience in research accounts.

I would also reemphasise the relevance of conducting research that is not driven by pre-existing marketplace messages per se, but, rather, by the participants, in order to enable alternative perspectives to emerge. This can be contrasted with surveying participants on the sole basis of the way they feel about current representations and offerings, as often is the case in consumer (but also media) research. Rather than casting the participant in a passive role driven by existing (if albeit not always set) marketplace significations, a change in focus has a significant impact on the way we understand and represent consumers.

This project has presented an opportunity to get involved in the dialogue of representation, and more so whilst integrating these images in the realm of consumer research and marketing scholarship. In this sense, giving the means of self-presentation via visual portraits disrupts the dominant order of marketing and consumer research. It enables individuals to undertake an active role in research and assert their liveliness and subjectivity in the process. As such, I believe this creates an opportunity for deeper involvement of participants, but also points to alternative insights into counter issues of epistemic closure as part of wider ethics in visual representation.

This brings me to return to the issue of ethics in representation. Overall, in CR, perhaps given our focus on consumption (rather than production) there is an emphasis on the object of consumption and the way people use/make sense of these objects (respectively, the site of the image, and the site of the audience in the case of visual

representation). The site of the image and the audience are seen as interesting and trustworthy loci of meaning creation. Conversely, CR, as with many fields interested with visual representations, tends to disregard the importance of people as authors (see for instance Mick, 1986). This is because the author's intentions and decisions are seen as a 'fallacy'; an incomplete site for meaning-making and interpretation (Rose, 2012).

Going back to the traditional view of fatness in CR can give us a clearer picture of the (political) importance of such a perspective. Traditionally in CR, we see the meanings as existing either within the object of consumption (the 'bad' cookie, or the 'sexist' image as objects of visual consumption), as emerging as part of the 'intertextual' system of consumer culture, or as being attributed by consumers in their act of interpretation of objects (including images). In the latter case, the consumer as interpreter 'is always right'... except, of course, if she is fat (and thus considered as a misguided/illegitimate consumer). What I argued for in this research is to turn this around by considering the participant as a potentially active (image) producer instead of someone who is solely, passively defined by the objects and messages available (or not) for them to (over or mis-)consume. But more so, by moving away from the all-encompassing realms of the market, I hope I managed to consider and represent the participant as (socially-located, yet) embodied authors capable of their own self-presentations.

Finally, I would like to address one of the fundamental questions underlying the conduct of this research in a feminist perspective: 'Did I need to be fuller-figured myself in order to research the topic without objectifying the participants?' Whilst the fact that I am fuller-figured myself did make me feel more confident with recruitment, and the mutual sharing of experience based on weight/size, I would not conclude that it is necessary, providing that some conditions are met. Using the terms of Freeland (2010), I believe that researchers – regardless of their own positionality – can succeed at interacting with their subjects and rendering them with human dignity, if they consider them as 'end versus means'; as 'unique and irreplaceable'; as 'autonomous and sovereign'; as 'having boundaries; and as 'alive and active'. I believe this case has been well illustrated by several researchers investigating identity markers different from their own (gender, disability, fatness, ethnicity etc.), and who have made an

important attempt to acknowledge the perspectives of the individuals involved in the research project. However, it is more dangerous to assume that 'being' (fuller-figured, female, disabled, etc.) gives the license of knowledge as a researcher. This is exemplified by Danieli and Woodhams (2005) who point to how academic disabled individuals in the field of disability studies have, at times, been regarded as dismissive of the perspectives of lay disabled individuals in the pursuit of their own political ideals. This is a risk that I incurred in the conduct of this research where it was tempting for me, at times, to assume that my experiences were reflective of those of the participants. Though I did my best to keep a critical distance and involve the participants in clarification, this should also be kept in mind when reading my interpretation, which can be seen as carrying some inherent bias.

The current research method is not flawless, of course. The results achieved herein are in great part influenced by the research approach, and the fact that I intentionally attempted to value the voice and subjectivity of the participants. This research also comes with inherent limitations, especially in terms of population of study. Namely, I am highly aware and self-conscious that the sample is characterised, much like myself, as female, Caucasian and middle-class. However, whilst these slightly homogenic samples could be problematic, if I were to attempt to typify fuller-figured individuals – which I do not want to do – generalisation is not the point here. It should also be expected that a more random sampling could have generated accounts and representations that are more in line with the current negative discourse of fatness in society and marketplace. My participants were generally more assertive as a recruitment criterion in an attempt to minimise emotional discomfort for the participants within research. This was also used as a means to show an alternative perspective to the negative understanding of fatness that is assumed to be adopted by fuller-figured individuals.

9. Conclusion

In the context of an ongoing war on 'obesity', there is a growing interest in Consumer Research (CR) of 'larger' consumers. In the field of CR, with a few exceptions aside, the topic of fatness is typically studied from an objectivist perspective and framed as a moral and/or medical problem. This objectivist epistemology has even gained a dominant foothold within CR, with researchers considering food consumption as not

only to be the main cause of 'weight problems' but, often, 'over consumption' as a synonym of fatness. Larger individuals are not only framed as 'over consumers', but also as consumers 'in the wrong' who need to be saved, to the extent that their 'inadequate' body is perceived as the outcome of irrational, pathological, market-manipulated or ill-advised consumption behaviours that could be addressed or solved by researchers.

Using a 'political' framing of fatness, as opposed to the widespread medical and moral problematisation highlighted above, makes it possible to conceive that our set framing of fat individuals in research designed for the sake of their welfare can also have adverse effects on their well-being, dignity and legitimacy. As such, I have argued that moving away from the objectivist research perspective on fuller-figured individuals – as well as the 'aberrant' behaviours or 'pathologies' that supposedly account for their status as such – is not only important for the sake of consumers' dignity, legitimacy and welfare, but also contributes to CR knowledge, by filling a gap which lies in the absence of the perspectives of larger individuals, in terms of how they make sense of their selves, bodies and well-being.

In order to contribute to filling this gap – by including the 'voices', or embodied perspectives of larger individuals – I designed a research approach, inspired by feminist research principles. Nine participants (including me as a participant-researcher) were invited to self-direct their own portraits, in collaboration with a professional photographer. This novel use of self-directed portraiture in CR enabled me (in conjunction with other means of data collection) to capture their voices and aspirations in terms of self-presentation, as well as capture the ways in which they can give meanings to their bodies and self via the act of self-presentation. Overall, the use of this research approach enabled the creation of an engaging experience for the participants, and, in doing so, let me access some of the meanings they gave to their selves.

This approach enabled a variety of meanings associated with the identity and bodies of fuller-figured women to be presented, from sentiments associated with self-loathing to more positive ones (including beautiful, attractive, active, alive, healthy, emotionally balanced, creative, smart and caring etc.) pointing to the complex identities of the participants. These meanings – at times celebratory and, at others,

more critical of fatness – importantly asserted their (often forgotten) subjectivity and capacity to create meaning for themselves.

The spheres of physical appearance, health and virtues have been traditionally used to make sense of the self and seen as part of a Judeo-Christian equation towards adequacy based on the exertion of self-control (and incidentally, the display of a controlled and thus presumed to be slender body). Whilst some participants challenged the equation (by highlighting contradictions), most participants highlighted the importance of these identity spheres in the pursuit of an adequate sense of self. However, they generally did so by altering the definitions of these terms, which prompted me to look for possible alternative discourses that could have enabled this shift.

In my interpretation I drew commonalities between the participants' accounts and the therapeutic discourse, and argued that participants seek self-actualisation and well-being via the therapeutic quest for what they perceive as their 'authentic' self. Together, the idea of a quest to find the real self and an ambiguity in the definition of what constitutes the latter, which emerged with the inception of the therapeutic discourse, seem to allow participants to integrate themselves in the definitions of 'positive appearance', 'health', but also 'valuable inner traits'. This is in spite of these culturally-pervasive terms being typically defined as the outcome of self-control and equating in slenderness.

Yet, the therapeutic mindset, in its quest for self-awareness and disinhibition to find what is thought to be the 'real' self, also values a rationalisation and control of emotions/body, which fits with some participants' accounts but seems at odds with others'. Some participants seemed to place a greater emphasis on the body; on the importance of its experience, the abilities it provides, and, as such, seemed to see it as a legitimate, valuable part of the self which requires awareness and care. This embodied perspective denotes a feminist influence and shows similarities with an Eastern spiritual mindset, which values the body, and the 'here and now' as an immanent locus of salvation (or perceived well-being and feeling of authenticity in these participants' cases). This, and the importance participants give to style as a site for self-actualisation and expression of what they perceive as their 'real' self, can be seen as influenced the marketplace's therapeutic (and feminist) consumerism.

Overall, the inclusion of fuller-figured individuals' subjective perspectives in this research contribute in filling a gap by pointing to the ways these people envision their bodies and appearance in light of, and contrast with, the dominant marketplace idealisation of slenderness. This research illustrates the relevance of both the therapeutic discourse and also an embodied perspective, to understanding the self and the body and going about acts of consumption. By building an alternative subject position – a self-nurtured position based on either or both the therapeutic ethos and the embodied perspective – participants are able to seek, build and sustain a legitimate sense of self without 'giving in' to the culturally enshrined pursuit of slenderness. This position is at odds with the sinful or irresponsible images usually associated with larger individuals. Similarly, this self-nurtured position challenges traditional approaches adopted in CR to envision well-being and solve the 'obesity crisis'.

The resilient perspective of the participants provides insights to rethink the notion of well-being in a more 'open', subjective way, and as a (pleasurable) quest, in contrast with the current approach which aims for the achievement of slenderness/eradication of 'obesity' as a finality. I have argued that this more open approach based on the process, as opposed to the finality, makes the quest for 'health' (as defined by a more subjective and attainable notion of well-being), a more enjoining undertaking for people of various embodied states. Importantly, the focus on the process as opposed to the finality may help offset issues of moral failure and stigmatisation which can be seen as important concerns for human welfare. Dislodging the position of slenderness as the unique referent of health and positive inner characteristics (but also possibly beauty) may also have positive implications in a perspective of ethics in visual representations. It may help undermine issues of idealisation of slenderness and erasure, as well as the 'othering' of fatness.

This research also offers contribution to the study of ethics in visual representation (and by extension, to the field of feminist research). I have pointed to the necessity to have more individuals taking part in the process of self-presentation, namely via the use of self-portraits. This, hopefully, will be aided by the rise of photo-based social media, which is rapidly democratising the image production and diffusion process and being used conjointly as part of marketing campaigns. In this context, whilst images are generally interpreted from a discourse analysis or semiotic

perspective, or in the context of their reception by specific audiences, I highlighted the necessity to reemphasise the site of production of self-portraits. Coming back to the voice/intents of those (self-)depicted reemphasises their humanity, their human experience and their complex subjectivity (if albeit influenced by existing discourses), and, thus, may contribute in offsetting epistemic closure. Furthermore, I believe that interpreting these intents with broader cultural/theoretical knowledge can give powerful insights into the ways individuals can picture themselves, disencumbered from the necessity to respond (and to confine themselves, to a certain extent) to the ways others have previously represented them.

Similarly, whilst I provide an interpretation of participants' accounts and portraits in this research, I do not want this interpretation to be confining. Rather, I hope to have created more questions than answers about the identities and meanings that can be associated with fuller-figuredness/fatness, by emphasising the differing – yet equally valid – voices of the participants who contributed to this research.

As a concluding remark, I would like to reiterate my hope for more opportunities for individuals of all embodied forms, abilities and cultural backgrounds to inform CR and the visual culture arena with their wide-ranging acts of self-presentation. This will contribute to instilling a more open, epistemic space that will both enrich our human knowledge and relations, and encourage the emergence of body-asserting discourses, which bring with them the possibility of loving and caring for oneself as one is.

Appendix 1 – Ethical approval form

The content of this appendix has been presented to and approved by the University of Exeter Business School's research ethics officer (Adrian Bailey) prior to undertaking the data collection. This appendix includes the signed ethical form, the project presentation which was used to collect participants' consent at the onset of the project, the photo copyright form, as well as the data protection act checklist developed with the university's data protection act officer as an additional measure to ensure data security.

**University of Exeter Business School
Ethical Approval Form: Research Students**

This form is to be completed by the research student. When completing the form be mindful that the purpose of the document is to clearly explain the **ethical considerations** of the research being undertaken.

Once completed, please submit the form **electronically and a signed hard copy** to Helen Bell at H.E.Bell@exeter.ac.uk. A copy of your approved Research Ethics Application Form together with accompanying documentation **must be bound into your PhD thesis**.

Part A: Background

Student name	Annie Blanchette		
Supervisors names	Dr Alexander Thompson Professor Anne Mesny (HEC Montreal)		
Title of thesis	Reframing the full-figured consumer		
Date of entry	January 2010	Status	FT
Start and estimated end date of the research	March 2012-June 2012		
Aims and objectives of the research	<p>This research is a participative action research. Its primary goal is to explore the way fuller-figured women want to be represented. The objective is also to inspire diversified modes of visual and speech representation in culture and in the marketplace. In order to do so my project invites the participants to get in the roles of the image-maker and model and create self-portraits to their wills and tastes.</p> <p>From a research perspective, this project will enable me to explore, document and analyse different modes of representation of full-figuredness coming from the subjective/creative perspective of full-figured women themselves. The participative research process itself will also be critically/reflexively evaluated, as I will be taking part in the project as a participant rather than as a researcher only.</p>		
Please indicate any sources of funding for the research	University of Exeter Business School Fonds Quebecois de Recherche Societe et Culture (FQRSC)		

Part B: Ethical Considerations

Describe the methodology that will be applied in the project (no more than 250 words)	As a way to suggest new modes of representation and inquiry of "full-figured" individuals, I am exploring a research approach called "Photovoice". The method consists in putting the participants in the roles of image-maker and model, giving them an opportunity to create their own representation, and in the process create meanings of and for themselves. The method encourages research subjects to create and discuss photographs of their own realities, focusing on assets, needs and aspirations. Photovoice is a participative action research method that was developed to account for the perspective and assess the needs of members of
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	<p>excluded or marginalised groups.</p> <p>A professional photographer/ help in stage-making will participate in the projet in order to ensure the most satisfactory visual output for the participants. The playful and creative elements of the process is expected to offset some of the negative feelings about getting involved in a research about full-figuredness/fatness. Besides, in order to dilute the observer/observed dichotomy, I will be taking part in the project.</p> <p>The process of creation will be documented, and the resulting visual images used, not only as an alternative/subjective visual account of "full-figured" individuals but also to prompt further discussions. The approach will be critically evaluated and contrasted with current discourses and research practices in consumer research</p> <p>The methodology is comprised of three main steps.</p> <p>1 – The participant is invited to fill a semi-private online journal in which she records a short presentation of herself, her thoughts for the photoshoots, and inspirations. The data collected at this stage will be words, and images, but may as well include music and/or videos.</p> <p>2 - The participant will take part in a photo session which should encapsulate elements of their ideal self-representation. The process may be audio recorded for references during the analysis process. Observational notes may be taken as well.</p> <p>3 - the participant will be invited to discuss their experience and resulting photo as well as find some captions to present their "work". This may take the form of recorded interviews or journal entries.</p>
<p>Describe the method by which you will recruit participants and gain their informed consent. If written consent will not be obtained, this must be justified.</p> <p><i>[Note: Please attach a copy of any Information Statements and Consent Forms used, including translation if research is to be conducted with non-English speakers]</i></p>	<p>Recruitment will be made with purposive sampling. Given that the criterion used to define normality and "overweight-ness" are criticised by corpulence studies scholars, using common indexes for selection can be very contentious. The criteria we use is that people feel that they relate to being "fuller" or "bigger" than mass-mediated female body norms". Although we are aware this is politically contentious, we reserve the right not to select people we feel may have unrealistic ideas of themselves being fuller (although this will be addressed as a research limit and pitfall). On the other hand, we are hoping to recruit a sample of women highlighting a certain diversity in sizes and age. We explicitly decided not to recruit individuals already involved in the "fat activism" or the "size acceptance movement" because they are already active in diffusing their perspective or actively researched by other scholars. On the other hand, the more "common consumer" has barely been investigated empirically.</p> <p>People will be mostly recruited in my extensive network</p>

	<p>in Devon. Recruitment in my network is a matter of convenience in terms of access and location. But mostly, I find it is easier to discuss body image with people who know and trust me. On the other hand, it is to be noted that I have only been in the UK during the course of this research (2 years now), and therefore I do not necessarily have a close, prior in-depth knowledge of the people who may agree to participate. This allows me to be in a position balanced between requirements of trust and reflective distance. Finally, snowball sampling will be used both with the participants and acquaintances who may have friends who have discussed matters of full-figuredness in the past. If they seem interested by the photo experience, they will be invited to get in touch with me.</p> <p>Explicit consent will be requested in stage 1 of the process via the private blog. This will include an authorisation for me to use the research data for analysis purposes and potential publication. Please refer to document 1 in annex for a complete description of the project and request for consent. This document will be posted in a highly visible position at the beginning of the blog. Participant will be asked to state their consent at the beginning of the blog, before pursuing with the project. A hard-copy of the form will be signed before the photo session. They will also be presented with a form about copyright (shared with the photographer) and offering different options with regards to diffusion within and beyond the scope of the research. Please see form 2 in annex.</p>
<p>Will there be any possible harm that your project may cause to participants (e.g. psychological distress or repercussions of a legal, political or economic nature)? What precautions will be taken to minimise the risk of harm to participants?</p>	<p>The project may have the potential to stir some difficult issues for the participants, although the tone and focus of the research is intended to be more playful and "celebratory". Included in the consent form will be the contact information of a professional support worker, should psychological distress occur. I will also make sure to assess the emotional state of the participant by staying in contact with them via the blog throughout this phase of the project, as well as conduct a debriefing at the end of the third phase. Participants will be explicitly informed of the risks of recognition given the use of photography. It will be my duty as a researcher to ensure that these images are diffused in contexts that foster the appreciation and dignity of the participants.</p> <p>There will be personal data collected and explicit consent will be sought in order to process the latter. Participants will be explicitly informed that their participation should be voluntary and that their anonymity will be difficult to preserve given the prominent use of self-portrait in the project. The option to use a pseudonym will be offered to the participants for the research outputs and copyrights. As the main researcher, I will make it my first and foremost concern to protect the</p>

	<p>dignity of the participants and use discerning judgement when referring to any personal/sensitive data.</p>
<p>How will you ensure the security of the data collected? What will happen to the data at the end of the project, (if retained, where and how long for)?</p> <p><i>[Note: If the project involves obtaining or processing personal data relating to living individuals, (e.g. by recording interviews with subjects even if the findings will subsequently be made anonymous), you will need to ensure that the provisions of the Data Protection Act are complied with. In particular you will need to seek advice to ensure that the subjects provide sufficient consent and that the personal data will be properly stored, for an appropriate period of time.]</i></p>	<p>During the project, some of the data will be on the blogger platform (Google). It will be password protected (access to invited authors only = main researcher and the participant). Data will be saved on both dropbox (password protected, used for sharing) and the backed-up university u:/ drive (encrypted). The photographer will also have a copy of the photos on her password protected computer. Back-ups will be made on a bi-monthly basis during the lifetime of the project.</p> <p>Selected content (that which is deemed relevant and appropriate by the main researcher) may be shared with the supervisors and the photographer in order to enhance the capacity to encapsulate the participants' vision (in their photo session) and analysis. This selected data, including the self-portraits, may be subject to publication within the thesis, other research output or an exhibition. We will seek the voluntary consent of the participants. Please refer to the Data Protection act check-list (discussed with the University's Record's Manager Caroline Dominey on March 6 2012) (form 3 in annex).</p> <p>At the end of the project, the data will be removed from blogger, dropbox and the U:/drive (the latter due to access restriction to non-registered students). I will store the encrypted data on a disk and/or harddrive. The data will also be stored on the Exeter Data Archive (platform currently being developed) with a permanent embargo. This will be a protected environment where I could have the data securely kept for future references/recovery in case of loss. The data will be kept for 20 years, according to the University of Exeter policy. Unnecessary sensitive content will be removed (cleaned) and the names will be change for pseudonym if requested by participants. The core of the information will be kept and associated with the appropriate participant data set. The data will be curated by the administrative staff of the Exeter Data Archive. The stable "handle" address will be used as a persistent link to the Exeter Data Archive.</p> <p>The data will be kept by the main researcher for selected publications. However, given the sensitivity of the data, the complete set will not be made accessible. Pictures with be associated with the narratives/audio files deemed relevant/necessary for future reference. These could be made accessible on a case by case basis, using my personal judgement as a researcher.</p>

Part C: Ethical Assessment

Please complete the following questions in relation to your research project.

	yes	no	n/a
Will participants' rights, safety, dignity and well-being be actively respected?	x		
Will you describe the main details of the research process to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	x		
Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	x		
Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	x		
Will confidentiality be appropriately maintained at all stages of the project, including data collection, storage, analysis and reporting?		x	
Will any highly personal, private or confidential information be sought from participants?	X		
Will participants be involved whose ability to give informed consent may be limited (e.g. children)?		x	
Will the project raise any issues concerning researcher safety?		x	
Are there conflicts of interest caused by the source of funding?		x	

Please provide any additional information which may be used to assess your application in the space below.

Data Protection Act compliance was discussed with Caroline Dominey, Records Manager at the University of Exeter, and responsible for the DPA. Data Management Plan was discussed with Gareth Cole, Data Curation Officer from the Open Exeter Project. His team is currently building a repository (Exeter Data Archive or Open Exeter) and I am one of the cases under observation to insure the project fits the needs and requirements of PhD researchers. I am also following series of workshop to help us integrate the best practices in Data Management in our researches.

Link to Mirrors: Prison Portraits project conducted at HMP Greenock with photographer Craig MacLean. This project served as an inspiration for the current project's research method:

<http://www.nationalgalleries.org/education/projects/mirrors-prison-portraits/hmp-greenock/>


Link to Photovoice.org (Participatory Photography for Social Change). I followed a Photovoice workshop, including training on session moderation and ethical requirements, in November 2011:

<http://www.photovoice.org/>

Part D: Supervisor's Declaration

As the supervisor for this research I can confirm that I believe that all research ethics issues have been considered in accordance with the University Ethics Policy and relevant research ethics guidelines.

Name: Alex Thompson (Primary Supervisor)

Signature: 

Date: 26/03/12

Part E: Ethical Approval

Comments of Research Ethics Officer and PGR Management Board.

[Note: Have potential risks have been adequately considered and minimised in the research? Does the significance of the study warrant these risks being taken? Are there any other precautions you would recommend?]

The main issue is around anonymity and the consent form has been well written to detail that anonymity cannot be guaranteed and is not part of the consent agreement. This should be emboldened for emphasis in the form.

This project has been reviewed according to School procedures and has now been approved.

Name: ADRIAN BAILEY

(Research Ethics Officer)

Signature: *A R Bailey*

Date: 30/03/2012

Annex 1 - Project presentation and consent request

(To be posted on each participant's blog at the very beginning of the project. To be printed and signed at the next "physical" meeting.)

The primary goal of this project is to explore the way "fuller-figured" women want to be represented. The objective is also to inspire diversified modes of visual and speech representation in visual culture and in the market. In order to do so, we - the research team and I (comprised of my two thesis supervisors in management/marketing, an experienced female photographer, and I) - have been developing a project in which we would like you to get in the roles of the image-maker and model and create self-portraits to your wills and tastes.

From a research perspective, this project will enable us to explore, document and analyse consumer-based modes of representation. At the end of the process, you will be asked if you feel comfortable to have your photo featured as part of a group publication and/or exhibition. The latter would aim to put across and value your own perspective, creativity and vision.

As a fuller statured woman myself, I will also take part in the project both as a participant and as a researcher. Aside from allowing me to put across and identify my own perspective (so that I make sure I can distinguish my vision from yours), joining the project in the role of the participant, will allow me to better understand the experience of participating in such a research.

The project is designed in 3 steps which should take place over a period of approximately 1 month and a half.

Step 1 - Imagining/creating your self-representation

In this first step, you will be asked to reflect on and imagine how you would like to be represented visually. Using a private blog, you should detail your ideas and their relevance to you. You are encouraged to include links to any medium (photo, text, artwork, music...) you find helps you articulate your envisioned self-portrait. I will, at time, ask you questions on the blog, in order to clarify my understanding of your idea. It is important, at this stage, for you to imagine how you would want to be represented now, in the current state of your body. You can be as creative and playful as you like.

This first step of the research will be carried over a month. Towards the end of the first step, I will ask you to describe as clearly as possible your envisioned "staging" (including your look and the setting). I will discuss with you ways of turning your vision into a feasible photoshoot set (we are likely to have to be creative and make concessions in the process, but your vision will still be the focus here). Because of the purpose of the project being to document your idea and vision - as well as because of the efforts and resources needed to set-up photo sessions - I really hope you will put the necessary effort into this first step. Although the goal is to work with all the participants across the project, we reserve the right as a research team to make the photo session conditional to sufficient input/content in the first step.

Step 2 - Photo session

Working with a professional photographer, we will build the photo set according to our means and resources in an allocated studio. We will ask you to sign a consent form at

the beginning, which will constitute an agreement to take part in the project at this stage, as well as address notions of copyright and ownership. The photographer will set-up the cameras and lighting, and you will act as a model (self-directed). You will have the option to take the photo yourself (with a remote shutter) or have the photographer take the photos for you. This part of the research will be recorded (notes and audio recording) in order to help our analysis of the research process.

Step 3 - Post photo session review

After the photo session (same day or week, depending on suitability and availability) we will review the images with you. Looking at the resulting images, you will be asked to discuss the process, the poses used, your preferences, etc. This process will be audio recorded for references in the analysis. Discussion will take place about how you would feel about having your image published.

Note on risks: The exercise may have the potential to stir some difficult issues, although the tone and focus of the research is intended to be more playful and "celebratory". Should you want to inform me of or discuss personal issues, please contact me at 07956304219. Should important distress occur, we advise you to seek the help of a trusted qualified practitioner or emergency help. Samaritans offers a free helpline at 08457 90 90 90. A debriefing session will be held before and after stage 2 and 3, to capture your feeling about the project and to ensure your emotional balance.

Although you will be given the option to use a pseudonym, the research team will not be able to guarantee full anonymity given the use of your photo in the research outputs, and (assuming your consent) in potential publication/exhibition of your images. The researcher will use caution and personal judgement in order to protect your dignity at all times. You will be invited to review and comment the content associated with you and your image before the publication of the thesis.

You will be given the opportunity to opt-out at any time until the publication of the thesis. If you wish to do so, you should contact Annie Blanchette via email at ab481@exeter.ac.uk. Discussion will take place with regards to the procedure to take to either dispose of or anonymise (remove the photos) the already gathered content.

Note on blog and data management: The blog will be set-up for you and secured according to Blogger's privacy policies. Access will be reserved to you and me, Annie Blanchette, the main researcher. The blog will be deleted at the end of the research project, but the content, saved in a secured environment.

Consent: I understand that my participation in this project is free and voluntary. I agree that the information provided in the 3 phases of the project may be used as part of a research analysis by Annie Blanchette and her collaborators. I understand that integral parts of my blog, as well as photos, can be communicated to other members of the research team, and feature as quotations in research outputs. Although I will be given the option to use a pseudonym, I understand that the research team will not be able to guarantee full anonymity given the use of images. I understand that I can opt-out from the project at any time before publication of the thesis, in which case the content already gathered can either be anonymised (with no photo) or removed according to my decision.

Annex 2 – Photo Copyright

COPYRIGHT, CONSENT & MODEL RELEASE FORM

1. COPYRIGHT

I, understand that I retain copyright of my images but give permission for Alice Deuchar Photography¹ and Annie Blanchette² to retain copies of the agreed edit of images for usage as consented to in the list below. I understand that my images will be credited shown as below when used:

© <CHOSEN NAME> 2011 / Alice Deuchar Photography / Annie Blanchette

2. CONSENT

CONSENT CHECKLIST

I am happy for <ORGANISATION> to use my photographs/Video/Audio in the following ways:	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
In Alice Deuchar Photography's website, publications and promotional materials		
In Annie Blanchette's online and offline research portfolio		

Do you want these photographs to be credited with your real name? YES / NO

If no please specify alternative name to be used.....

3. MODEL RELEASE

I am happy for Alice Deuchar Photography and Annie Blanchette to retain copies of photos that feature me, for usage as consented to in the list above.

YES / NO

¹ <http://www.alicedeuchar.co.uk/details/>

² <http://exeter.academia.edu/AnnieBlanchette>

PLEASE FILL IN YOUR FULL CONTACT DETAILS BELOW:

Full name:

Address:

Postcode:

Country:

Date of birth:

Tel:

Mobile:

Email:

Other:

Signed:

Date:

If you would like to withdraw from this agreement please contact Alice Deuchar Photography and Annie Blanchette by letter or email and we will stop using your images from the date that notification is received but this can not apply to images already in use as they can not be withdrawn.

Annex 3 - Data Protection Checklist

(Reviewed by Caroline Dominey, Records Manager (responsible for the Data Protection Act) at U. of Exeter)

	REQUIREMENT	Y/N
A	Meeting the conditions for the research exemptions: (If your research meets the following conditions it is exempt from certain aspects of the Data Protection Act)	
1	The information is being used <i>exclusively</i> for research purposes. Answer: Selected photos and associated narratives may be used in other publications/exhibitions that will value the voice of the participants. The photos may also be used as part of the creative portfolio of the photographer involved. Explicit consent will be requested from participants. Researcher's judgement will be used to ensure the dignity of the participants.	N
2	The information will not be used to support measures or decisions relating to <i>any</i> identifiable living individual.	N
3	You are not using the data in a way that will cause, or is likely to cause, substantial damage or substantial distress to any data subject. Answer: Substantial efforts will be made by the researcher to minimize emotional risks (assessment via debriefing). Participants will be informed of the potential emotional and recognition risks in the consent process. They will be provided with the contact details of a support worker should distress occur.	N
4	You will not make the result of your research, or any resulting statistics, available in a form that identifies the data subject. Answer: Consent will be requested for different use of the images. Although anonymity cannot be safeguarded, we will give the participants the option to use a pseudonym.	N
B	Complying with the First Data Protection Principle:	
1	You have fulfilled one of the conditions for using personal data, e.g. you have obtained consent from the data subject. Indicate which condition you have fulfilled here: Answer: I will seek and obtain explicit consent from the participants before pursuing the project.	Y
2	If you will be using sensitive personal data you have fulfilled one of the conditions for using sensitive personal data, e.g. you have obtained explicit consent from the data subject. Indicate which condition you have fulfilled here: Answer: I will seek and obtain explicit consent from the participants before pursuing the project.	Y
3	You have informed data subjects of: i. What you are doing with the data; ii. Who will hold the data, usually the University; iii. Who will have access to or receive copies of the data.	Y
4	Q3 above is not necessary if all the following conditions apply: i. The data has been obtained from a third party; ii. Provision of the information would involve disproportionate effort; iii. You record the reasons for believing that disproportionate effort applies, please also give brief details here:	n/a
C	Meeting the conditions of the Third Data Protection Principle:	
1	You have designed the project to collect as much information as you need for your research but not more information than you need.	Y

	Answer: Excess of sensitive information will be discarded according to the researcher's judgement.	
D	Meeting the conditions of the Fourth Data Protection Principle:	
1	You will take reasonable measures to ensure that the information you collect is accurate. Answer: The process involves constant interaction with the participants.	Y
2	Where necessary you have put processes in place to keep the information up to date. Answer: The project intends to be a "snapshot" of a participant at a particular time	Y
E	Meeting the conditions of the Sixth Data Protection Principle:	
1	<p><i>You should</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Inform the data subject that you are going to use their personal data. ii. Stop using an individual's data if it is likely to cause unwarranted substantial damage or substantial distress to the data subject or another. iii. Ensure that no decision, which significantly affects a data subject, is based solely on the automatic processing of their data. iv. Stop, rectify, erase or destroy the personal data of an individual, if necessary. <p>Please give brief details of the measures you intend to take here:</p> <p>I will inform the research participant that I will be using their personal data for research purposes and request their explicit consent to do so. The participant will be informed that there are potential risks associated with the project. Although significant efforts will be made by the researcher to minimise these risks, if I see that damage or distress occurs, I will find ways to remediate to the situation (by pulling the data where possible).</p>	
F	Meeting the conditions of the Seventh Data Protection Principle:	
1	<p>You have made suitable security provisions for the data including assessing the security of your work environment and the systems you use. Please give brief details of the measures you intend to take here:</p> <p>The semi-private blog (Blogger platform) used in the research will be restricted in access to the participant and the researcher. It will be password protected. Data will be backed-up on a dropbox account (password protected account and encrypted file) as well as on a computer hard-drive (use account password protected and encrypted file). Relevant data will be shared (email) with supervisors and the photographer to ensure the best analysis/rendition. Data will be erased from blogger after the project. Stored for 15 years on the University of Exeter database at the end of the project (encrypted and password protected). Data may be diffused in publications and conferences related to the research. Further diffusion of the images will be subject to the participant's consent (photographer's portfolio and promotion/ exhibition of the project images).</p>	
G	Meeting the conditions of the Eighth Data Protection Principle:	
1	<p>You can not transfer personal data outside the EEA unless one of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The country you are transferring the data to has been designated as providing adequate protection for personal data; ii. You have obtained explicit consent from the data subject(s); iii. You have an appropriate contract with the recipient of the data, which specifies the appropriate data protection requirements that must be met; iv. You have completely anonymised the data. <p>Indicate which condition you have met and which country you will transfer the data to here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The country I am transferring the data to has been designated as providing adequate protection for personal data; (Canada) 	

Appendix 2 – Guide questions for conversation

(These were used when deemed appropriate by the researcher, in blogs, emails and face-to-face conversations.)

Tell me about yourself/your body.

How do you feel about yourself/your body?

Is this how you would like to feel about yourself/your body?

How do you refer to yourself/your body?

How would you describe yourself physically?

How would you like others to describe you physically?

What would you consider an offensive physical description of yourself?

Do you feel represented in visual culture/fashion imagery?

Is being represented in terms of size in visual culture/marketplace important to you?

What do you think about the representation of people with similar bodies as yours?

How would you like to be portrayed in visual culture?

Can you describe your envisioned photo session with as much detail as you can (decor, your clothes, your positions, your expressions, the 'mood' of the photo session, etc.)?

What do these elements mean to you and how do they represent you?

Appendix 3 – Photographer’s consent for use of material

Mrs Alice Deuchar,
Alice Deuchar Photography

December 22, 2014

Dear Mrs Deuchar,

I am completing a doctoral thesis at University of Exeter and I am contacting you to request permission to include the following material within the electronic version of my PhD:

Photographic portraits of research participants taken in the context of this thesis project [“the Material”]

I would like to make my thesis available as an electronic version deposited in University of Exeter’s online repository <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/105>. Once available in digital format, access to the thesis will be freely available via the Web and through the ‘Electronic Thesis Online Service’ (EThOS) provided by the British Library (<http://EThOS.bl.uk/>) where a copy may also be held. The User of the thesis will be required to agree that they shall only use the thesis for non-commercial research, private study, criticism, review and news reporting, illustration for teaching, and/or other educational purposes in electronic or print form.

I would be grateful if you could grant me permission to include the Material in my thesis and to use the Material, as set out above, royalty free in perpetuity. Please be aware that the Material will be archived by the British Library as part of EThOS in perpetuity.

I/WE HEREBY GRANT PERMISSION FOR USE OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE PURPOSES AND ON THE TERMS IDENTIFIED ABOVE



(Signature).....

Mrs Alice Deuchar

Date.....22/12/14.....

Yours sincerely,

Annie Blanchette

University of Exeter Business School

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