On Online Activism and the Probabilities of Social Media

The Body Positivity Movement,

Social Network Sites, and the Production of Discourse

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Abstract
The Body Positivity Movement is an online feminist movement which contests dominant bodily norms and beauty ideals. The movement uses social network sites as a platform for online activism, to subvert repressive discourses on body normativity by expressing their subjectivity and presenting new representations of marginalized bodies. However, in their online activity, the Body Positivity Movement participates in the conventions that are distinctive characteristics of social media culture, what Lev Manovich terms 'probabilities.' The concept of probabilities describes how social media platform's cultural conventions and technological affordances determine how a platform is used, and produce dominant discourses and reiterate repressive power relations. This thesis looks at the Body Positivity Movement and their activity on blogs, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube, and the paradox that unfolds when a feminist movement finds itself embedded within the discoursed probabilities of a social media platform. It addresses how the movement utilizes these social network sites as platforms to spread their message, and how the platforms can affect or even contradict their activist objective. The analysis applies the methods Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis in order to reveal what discourses are conveyed in the movement's social media posts and how they subvert or repressive discourses, and how these discourses are produced by the platforms' probabilities. Finally, the thesis touches upon a wider debate on online citizen participation and online activism, to address to what extent it is possible for subversive online activism to exist on these platforms.

Keywords: Body Positivity Movement; Critical Discourse Analysis; Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis; Discourse Analysis; Online Activism; Probabilities; Social Media; Social Network Sites; Body Normativity; Beauty Ideal; Marginalized Identities

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1. Introduction

In the age where social movements are founded on the use of a single hashtag, it is important to assess whether or not the platforms themselves have an impact on an online movement, and if so, to what extent? This is especially of significance with a feminist movement that occupies itself with subverting notions of body normativity, as the dominant discourses that are present on the online platforms might contradict their own objective. This is the case with the Body Positivity Movement, a feminist movement active on various social network sites. The Body Positivity Movement sees contemporary dominant bodily norms and beauty ideals as an oppressing and excluding discourse. The movement uses social network sites as a platform to express their subjectivity and present different representations, as the social media platforms enable them to create their own representations and expressions.

However, in this period in time characterized by the resurgence of feminist discourse on online media, often seen as the fourth feminist wave rooting in social media platforms and prominently characterized by the omnipresence and influence of the recent #metoo movement, it is important to look into online feminist movements, to question whether these platforms are neutral grounds, or whether these platforms influence the movement's production of discourse. This is illustrative of a wider debate on the potential and disadvantages of citizen participation on online media. Through online media, accessibility and participation become more open and available to a wider public, allowing for new socio-political movements to form and producing new ways to be socio-politically engaged. Critics, however, characterize online activism and other forms of online socio-political engagement as 'slacktivism' and call into question to what extent actual change can be accomplished from online movements.

Furthermore, it is important to question the neutrality of the social media platforms that online activism is situated on. According to André Brock, a technological platform is highly influenced by its technological and cultural context, and the way it is used through social conventions (2012, 530-531; 2016, 5, 8-9). Brock acknowledges that this understanding is often overlooked in various research methods, which motivated him to developed the method called Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis to account for the active role of technical communication platforms in the production of discourse (2012, 530-531). This thesis will utilize this relatively new method as well, adding to the research on disproving technological communication platforms as neutral, which, as Brock states, conventional research on social media sites lacks.

Online activist movements utilize online platforms for their easy access and networkability, but often do not interact with the question of the neutrality of these platforms. It is therefore important to assess the role of the social media platforms in the production of discourse in relation to online activist movements. Lev Manovich assesses the conventions and affordances that are distinctive characteristics of social media culture, which he terms 'probabilities.' The concept of probabilities describes how social media platform's social and cultural conventions and its technological affordances determine how a platform is used, and produce dominant discourses and reiterate repressive power relations (Manovich 26, 53). It is important to inquire into the relation between activist content and online platforms, as the probabilities of social media platforms problematizes the dependency of online movements on the platforms. Online activism can be limited by the probabilities of the social media platforms they situate themselves on as they become susceptible to the established conventions that have come into being on social media platforms, which, in turn, produce the very repressive discourses that the online movements aim to subvert. It poses the question whether subversive representation can even be done on these online platforms, as online activist undertakings becomes tainted by problematic discourses intrinsic to the platforms themselves.

The Body Positivity Movement that is active online illustrates the duality that occurs when a feminist movement engages with social media. In their online activism, the movement presents new narratives and representations of marginalized bodies, to against certain bodily norms and beauty standards. But in doing so, they participate in the dominant communication culture of social media platforms. The movement partakes in various trends that have come to be distinctive characteristics of the culture of social media, which reiterate certain dominant norms and discourses that convey repressive power relations. Yet, simultaneously, the platform repeats and reinforces existing, repressive discourses, and is based on a social pressure to participate in the online conversation. This creates a paradoxical relationship between the online activist movements and online platforms: new media offer a new platform for new representations and for marginalized voices to be heard, while at the same time engage in existing repressive discourses.

It is this ambiguous relation between online activism and online platforms that will be addressed in this thesis. It will look at the Body Positivity Movement that is active on social media, and the paradox that unfolds when a feminist movement finds itself contained within the cultural conventions of a social media platform. It will address how the Body Positivity movement utilizes blogs, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube as platforms to spread their message, but also how their activism can be affected or even limited by these social network sites they so eagerly engage with. I will assess how they utilize the Internet's potential for obtaining information, content creation and

social mobilization on social network sites. Additionally, this framework provides a critical point of view, addressing the limitations of the medium itself and how this possibly affects the movement's activity on the online platform.

In order to account for this dichotomy in the use of social media in online activism, I will therefore situate this thesis within a wider debate on new media and online activism, using concepts of networked society, public sphere, and interactive media user to account for citizen participation and citizen activism in online communication in the participatory space created by online connectivity. Adding to this, it will inquire into self-representation on social media, building on and adding to recent research on self-representation in selfies, as done by Mehita Iqani, Lev Manovich, Jill Walker Rettberg, Alise Tifentale, and Brook Wendt, while also referencing Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. The concept of 'probabilities' as defined by Manovich will be used to account for the conventions and probabilities of self expression and representation of Instagram, Twitter and YouTube as social media platforms.

Additionally, this thesis will touch upon the field of Fat Studies, a relatively new research field, in hopes of making a valuable addition to the field as it will comment on how to do Fat Activism. Moreover, it will build on the research done by Melissa Gibson and Alexandra Sastre on the Body Positivity Movement, in hopes of expanding on their findings with a more detailed understanding of the platforms utilized by the movement from a Media Studies perspective, as their research lacks an assessment of this aspect. Both Gibson and Sastre look at the content of the messages posted on various online platforms, to determine themes and tropes of online representation of marginalized bodies, and critiquing the movement where it diverts from its original message. This thesis will add to this by not only looking at the content, but also at the infrastructure of each social media platform and take into account the probabilities of the platforms, and how this affects, limits or produces the content the movement posts on these platforms.

To analyze the Body Positivity Movement's activity, a number of messages will be collected to demarcate a specific body of research. This thesis will look at four different social media platforms, blogs, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, from which the research material will be drawn. By collecting messages posted each day on each platform through the use of the hashtag #bodypositivity for a period of seven days, the movement's activity within this specific time frame will be analyzed to establish an adequate representation of this vast online movement.

In order to asses the relation between the probabilities of these social media platforms and the discourses propagated by the Body Positivity Movement, I have come to the following research question:

How do the probabilities of social media platforms Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs produce the discourse of the online Body Positivity Movement?

With this research question, I hope to answer if the discourses produced by the conventions of these online platforms affect or even produce the discourses of the Body Positivity Movement, as they utilize these platforms for activist purposes.

To answer this question, I will look at the following subquestions:

- What is the potential and what are the disadvantages of online activism, how do they relate to the Body Positivity Movement's online activism on social media?
- What are the probabilities of the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs, and what discourses do they convey?
- How are these discourses reflected in the messages the Body Positivity Movement post on these online platforms?
- How does self-representation on social media reproduce or subvert dominant discourses?
- What discourses do the posts of the Body Positivity Movement on the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs convey?
- How does the Body Positivity Movement use self-representation as a means of online activism?

In order to answer these questions, the method of Discourse Analysis will be used to analyze the discourses conveyed in the messages posted by the Body Positivity Movement on social media, and the discourses produced by the probabilities of social media platforms. Specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis, as described by Teun A. van Dijk, and Marianne Jorgensen and Louise J. Phillips, will be used to analyze discourses present in the Body Positivity Movement's posts, as this approach focuses on power structures, and the ways texts can convey discourses subverting and resisting, but also reiterating and reinforcing dominant discourses present in society. Using this approach, a repetition in imagery, captions, tweets and video content by the Body Positivity Movement will be assessed to identify themes that reveal the movement's narrative. In addition to

this, I will draw upon the method of semiotics to the visual aspects of these posts.

Secondly, Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA), as defined by Brock, will be used to identify the discourses produced by the probabilities of Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs as social media platforms. CTDA not only looks at the discourses produced on online communication platforms, but also accounts for the technology's interface and cultural conventions of its use, and in doing so, provides a thorough analysis of discourse production through technological communication platforms (Brock 2012, 531). Through this method, it will be assessed how the probabilities of these social media platforms play a role in the production of discourse. Using both critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis as research methods, I will be able to analyze how the posts of the Body Positivity Movement on social media challenge, reiterate or even produce dominant discourses.

In order to assess the role of the probabilities of social media in the production of discourse within the Body Positivity Movement, the thesis is structured as follows: First, using texts on Body Positivity and Fat Studies, I will provide a short synopsis of the Body Positivity Movement, their motivation, and the discourses they go against, to explain the main narrative of the movement and provide a context for the discourses that will be disclosed in the following analysis. Secondly, a theoretical framework will outline theories on online activism, self-representation and social media probabilities. It will firstly assess the debate on the potential and disadvantages of online media for citizen participation, online activism, and the digital public sphere. This framework provides a variety of perspectives on online activism, in order to assess whether or not subversive online activism is actually possible, and/or what limitations it meets. Additionally, this chapter will explicate the theory on online self-representation, in order to assess how posting messages on social media platforms is a form of self-expression, and how these self-expressions convey discourses and counter-discourses. Lastly, this chapter further assesses the concept of probabilities, in order to consider how these self-expressions are created within the confinement of discourses intrinsic to these social media platforms.

Next, a chapter on methodology provides a further explanation of Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis, and provides a more thorough explanation of how the research will be conducted, and how the research material is demarcated. What follows is a two-part discourse analysis of messages posted by body-positive feminists on Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and blogs to assess firstly how the movement uses these social media as a platform to express new narratives and present new representations of marginalized bodies, in order to debunk discourses on bodily norms and beauty ideals. Secondly, the analysis assesses how the Body Positivity Movement's use of Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs in turn produces

repressive discourses, as they are steered by the platforms' probabilities, which are tied to dominant power structures . In doing so, I hope to be able to answer what happens to the feminist discourse of an online movement such as the Body Positivity Movement when it is embedded within the discoursed probabilities of social media.

2. The Body Positivity Movement

2.1 Body Normativity

The main objective of the Body Positivity Movement is to counter existing, disciplinary, repressive norms on bodies. These bodily norms prioritize being able-bodied, white, cis-gender, heterosexual, thin, and healthy as being 'normal,' and subsequently marginalize deviating bodies into 'others' (Gailey 9; Gibson). In case of the female body, these norms condition women to adhere to standards on femininity. In her article on the fat body in feminist theory, Cecilia Hartley states that the female body is conditioned to make themselves smaller and to restrain their bodies to take up less space, in compliance with the notion of femininity as thin (61). Fat oppression is then a consequence of this notion of femininity as thinness, which implies that women are not allowed to take up space (Hartley 61). These bodily norms then produce stereotypes and negative tropes on non-normative bodies, such as the fat (female) body. Such stereotypes depict the fat body as lazy, gluttonous, unfeminine, irresponsible and unable to control their impulses (Gailey 17, 20; Orbach 13). Their apparent lack of self-discipline and overindulgence symbolizes a failure of the self, a failure to become an ideal neoliberal subject (Gibson). Fat is then seen as an individual problem, placing the blame for one's deviance with the person themselves (Gailey 15; Orbach 13). Paradoxically, the fat woman is stripped from her individual identity, as her personality is equated with the stereotype of the “fat woman” (Gibson).

These bodily norms on fatness weigh even heavier in relation to the female body, as fatness is also seen as inherently unfeminine. In her essay “Fat is a Feminist Issue,” Susie Orbach argues that overeating is a way of coping for women suffering under the pressure of the social gender roles ascribed to them (14). She argues in favor of a feminist theoretical perspective on compulsive eating by women, as opposed to seeing it as an individual problem (Orbach 14). Orbach sees this overindulgence as a woman's way of coping with the a dissatisfaction with the prescribed female role as the mother and the lack of appreciation she receives for fulfilling this (20-21). Overeating is then a means to filling up this emptiness (Orbach 20). However, in this reasoning, Orbach overlooks the notion that overconsumption is seen as a negative trait for women, as they, as mothers, are expected to be providers, and not to take for themselves, especially not over-abundantly (Hartley 70). Fatness is then understood as unfeminine, as it signifies overindulgence, where a woman is supposed to provide. Moreover, Orbach's point of view still regards fatness as a problem, rather than seeing the social stance which marginalizes fat bodies as the problem. Fat is a feminist issue, not because compulsive eating is a result of social pressure on woman. Fat is a feminist issue because we should criticize and question oppressing body norms and beauty ideals, and strive

towards equal treatment of those who deviate from 'the norm.' Orbach sees fat as a negative consequence of gender inequality, a woman's desperate response to gender oppression, which in some cases could be so. However, fatness could also just be fat, regardless of its cause, and still be a feminist issue. Feminist theory on the fatness should be focused on liberating the fat body from social abuse through debunking imposed social roles and beauty ideals where the critique originates from.

Hartley provides a different analysis of the fat female body, questioning why society has such a negative stance on female fatness, when women are biologically prone to have more fat (67). She also seeks the answer in prescribed gender roles, arguing that fatness is regarded as deviant and unfeminine, because women have to physically embody their inferiority to men, by taking up less space (Hartley 62). By 'outgrowing' the allowed boundaries of their bodies, she poses a threat to these roles that subordinate her to men, violating existing power structures (Hartley 62, 64-65).

Bodies that do not adhere to the feminine ideal of thin and small, are unfeminine, are ridiculed and mocked as a means of discipline, limiting them in their personal freedom (Hartley 63). In her article on the paradox of hyper(in)visibility of fat women, Jeannine Gailey explains that everybody in society is disciplined to adhere to the norm (19). This discipline comes from the controlling gaze of others, but is also internalized, to ensure the formation of a 'good' society consisting of 'good' citizens (Gailey 10). To substantiate this, she refers to Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies,' where people police their own behavior as a result of the ever-present normalizing gaze (Gailey 10). As Gailey states, all bodies are susceptible to this disciplinary surveillance, but those bodies that fall outside of the norm are more prone to fall victim of discipline from others (10). Normative bodies, or what Gailey calls privileged bodies, are rendered invisible, as they already adhere to the norm, their actions are not questioned, and are often even allowed to transgress social boundaries (Gailey 10-11). Everybody and every body has to adhere to the norm, but bodies that fall outside of the norm are met with suspicion and condemnation. Non-normative bodies are policed more extensively, as their deviance is visible on the surface. This is where Gailey formulates her theory on the hyper(in)visible fat woman, where a fat woman is simultaneously hyper-visible because of their size, and rendered invisible in the malign treatment of being socially ignored (7-8). She is surveilled through her visibility, as her deviance is a visible, physical characteristic (Gailey 10, 24). “People cannot hide their fat. They literally wear their stigma on their bodies for everyone to see” (Gailey 24). In addition to this, fat people are also policed on their personality and behavior through their non-normative appearance, as stereotypes attribute negative traits such as laziness, overindulgence and lack of discipline to the fat body (Gailey 24).

Fat activists and feminist scholars aim to rethink this stigma, and formulate a conception of

fatness as an act of rebellion against the social norms imposed on them. In their article “Coming Out as Fat,” Abigail Saguy and Anna Ward explain how fat activists use the 'coming out' narrative to reclaim their bodies (2). In coming out as fat, the fat activists are affirming their fatness, reclaiming the term as a neutral description and a fixed part of their identity, as opposed to a state of being that demands change (Saguy and Ward 2, 13). In affirming their fatness, the word can no longer be used against them to insult or discipline them, as the fat person themselves shows an acceptance of their body the way it is (Saguy and Ward 14). Saguy and Ward go on to argue that in reclaiming their fatness, fat activists are redefining the cultural definition of fatness (14). By flaunting their fatness, fat activists debunk stereotypes on fatness as unattractive, immoral and undesirable, and redefine their bodies on their own terms (Saguy and Ward 14).

In addition to rejecting bodily norms and stereotypes of fatness, fat can signify of a rejection of succumbing to rules on femininity as well. As stated above, Orbach sees compulsive eating as a method for women to cope with the social pressure of gender roles (20-21). In addition to this, she argues that getting fat is a means to liberate oneself from these gender roles and sex stereotypes, a deliberate choice made to challenge notions of womanhood (Orbach 15). Being fat then allows a woman to avoid the label of an 'ideal woman' and other imposed imagery that she is supposed to adhere to to find a male partner (Orbach 17). Orbach then sees fatness as a sign of rebellion against the social pressure of these gender roles (17). Hartley supports this, as she regards fatness for women as a tool of power against oppressing gender rules (66, 70). The mere presence of the fat woman shows her disregard for society's rules on femininity (Hartley 66). She becomes the embodiment not of a failed neoliberal subject, but rather of a desecration of the norms that everyone in society is expected to adhere to. Fatness is a means of power for a woman, as it enables her to deny any demands placed on her because of her gender, and take up space in the world that is normally denied her (Hartley 70).

Foucault theorizes the body as an agent of power, and understands power as repressive as the body is disciplined, but power as creative as well, as subjects can change and transform the distribution of power in society (Gibson). It is because of this creative characteristic of power that those who are marginalized because of their divergent appearance are able to challenge the norms that exclude them; by defining their life in their own terms and expressing this openly, they make a political statement as they defy the expectations and limitations society holds against them (Gibson). By choosing to openly come out as fat, flaunting their deviance, and rejecting imposed gender roles, the fat woman uses her body as a vehicle of power to subvert and challenge the norms that are inflicted upon her and discourses that exclude her.

2.2 Body Positivity as Online Activism

The Body Positivity Movement is an online movement that addresses the stigma on fatness and aims to denounce the negative stereotypes surrounding this. In her essay on the Body Positivity Movement, Melissa Gibson describes how the movement originates from the Fat Liberation movement from the 1970's (Gibson). The Fat Liberation movement addressed the oppression of fat people and the origin thereof, and denouncing the general discourse around fat bodies (Gibson). The Body Positivity Movement originated from this objective, and in addition to the liberation of fat people, included people with other marginalized body-types as well, such as people of color, people with disabilities and transgender people. Their aim is to dismantle negative visual representations of these marginalized identities, and question how they can perform their own identity against these stereotypes (Gibson). It all started around 2010, when fat women claimed a virtual space where they could express their own identities by posting self-representations on Facebook, Tumblr and blogs: from here the movement was born (Gibson). The movement makes use of the hashtags #bodypositive and #bodypositivity (Gibson), which enables social media users to contribute to the movement and archives the posts under the same denominator.

In her article on the Body Positivity Movement, Alexandra Sastre explains how the movement originates from and benefits of the Internet and social media as new communication technologies. Online body-positive platforms challenge bodily norms that center on thinness, and proclaim to be a safe space for others to represent their narrative and their bodies (Sastre 929-930). Also known as the 'fat-o-sphere,' it deconstructs normative notions of beauty, by responding to the demand of different representations and facilitating conversations on various topics, ranging from as personal as clothing and relationships, to more political content as addressing structures of oppression in contemporary society (Gibson; Sastre 930). As Sastre states, the movement does not operate in a traditional way, as there is no centralized form of organization, or one platform facilitating the discussion, but rather a network of individual posts linked together to work towards a different conception of the body (933). This networked structure of individual posts tending to a bigger narrative also illustrates the connection between movement's objective to personal narratives (Sastre 933).

According to fat activist and Fat Studies scholar Cat Pausé, one of the many perks attributed to new media technologies for this movement, is its ability to form communities, for like-minded peers to connect, converse and combat oppressing discourses (Pausé). This community forms an online space for these marginalized identities to speak out, share their own stories and perspectives with a larger audience, and debunk the dominant narrative that is placed upon them (Pausé). Because of the tools new media provide, a new narrative on fatness is emerging, one that is

controlled by fat people themselves (Pausé). In addition to these new, personal stories on fatness, new media also allow for new representations on this marginalized identity as well. In her article on digital media and body weight, Deborah Lupton explains that digital media technologies allow for users to not only consume, but produce content as well, allowing them to represent themselves through images on various social media platforms (120). Moreover, the visual turn in online platforms, placing more emphasis on creating and sharing visual content, functions as a breeding ground for fat acceptance initiatives, as it enables them to counter negative, stereotypical representations in mainstream media with self-produced imagery of how they want to be represented (Lupton 123).

Lastly, through these platforms, fat people are not only able to counter negative stereotypes, but are also able to challenge the dominant notion that they should change themselves (lose weight) to conform to the dominant notions of society. According to Gibson, for a fat person to represent their normal, daily life is already a political act, as it challenges the dominant understanding of fat people as social outcasts (Gibson). Additionally, Lupton argues that many online fat activists oppose the 'good fatty' stereotype, where a fat person actively tries to adhere to social beauty standards by trying to lose weight and dress appropriately (124). Instead, they perform their identity as the 'rad fatty,' where they chose to openly carry their weight unapologetically and flamboyantly, and in doing so, they actively go against the notion that a fat person should aspire to be thin (Lupton 123-124).

Pausé's and Lupton's praise of the potential of new media technologies for the Body Positivity Movement and other marginalized identities alike, illustrates how many Fat Studies Scholars mainly focus on the positive side of the Internet and the potential it holds for activist initiatives from marginalized identities. But in doing so, they fail to recognize the limitations these technologies brings, and the problematic issues it holds for these same groups. The essays of both Gibson and Sastre, who asses the Body Positivity Movement from a critical point of view, illustrate how the movement's use of online platforms should not be uncriticized. The movement's use of hashtags holds the potential for easy accessibility and findability, but is also met with a downside. In her essay, Gibson assesses to what extent the posts posted with these hashtags associated with the movement actually carry out the movement's objective, and came to the conclusion that the hashtag has been adopted by people of non-marginalized bodies where the concept of body-positivity has become synonymous with the notion of self-love (Gibson). While the two concepts are closely related, the difference lies in that self-love is a synonym for feeling good about your body, whereas the term body-positivity exclaims a statement for those whose bodies have been marginalized to dismantle the system of oppression (Gibson). The result is that the feed of the hashtag has become a

mixture of self-representations of marginalized bodies claiming representation, and posts by thin, white, able-bodied people celebrating their self-confidence. Gibson proposes a “policy of exclusion” in order to redirect the movement's activity to the representation of marginalized bodies alone, as only this measure would lead to the subversion of the established social hierarchy of different bodies (Gibson). However, an implementation of such a policy cannot be undertaken, as you cannot prohibit others from using the hashtag. This exemplifies the vulnerability of a non-centrally-organized movement, as their label can easily appropriated, leading to a deterioration of the socio-political significance of the hashtag.

Additionally, Sastre notes that the pictures posted on the body-positive blogs she analyzed reiterated neoliberal discourses as opposed to rejecting them (Sastre 936). The blogs invite non-normative bodies to claim visibility in a public space as a form of radical liberation liberation (Sastre 936). The notion of bodily self-improvement through one's own choice is a construct of neoliberal citizenship, as these choices are often enforced through commercialism (Sastre 932). The Body Positivity Movement wishes to disconnect the notion of self-recognition with commodities and self-improvement (Sastre 932). However, this still upholds the notion of giving up privacy and exposing oneself as means to bodily-acceptance (Sastre 937). In doing so, they reiterate problematic neoliberal discourses, not in the way they present themselves (barely clothed or nude, exposing the body for what it is), but by seeking affirmation in others, willfully placing themselves as the object of a panoptic gaze (Sastre 936). This participation in more inclusive representation facilitates the notion of neoliberal citizenship, and mimics the discourses the movement wishes to oppose (Sastre 931, 936). As Sastre states: “rather than liberating the docile body, there is merely an extension of who is allowed to declare her compliance” (936-937). Rather than challenging the norm, these blogs inquire for the norms to be adjusted to more inclusive terms. According to Sastre, this illustrates how the Body Positivity Movement is still caught in a web of bodily regulations, as participants willingly submit themselves before the panoptic gaze, in a similar way as occurs with social media users posting a selfie (Sastre 936).

Sastre's research method remains rather questionable, as she analyzes three prominent blogs that are reminiscent of the movement's objective, but do not actively identify as part of the Body Positivity Movement. However, her findings are of great interest, as it indicates that messages posted with a body-positive message in mind can still be susceptible to dominant, oppressing discourses, and can even simultaneously convey contradictory discourses, which leads to a deterioration of the intended message of the post. Sastre sees the solution lying in re-imagining the movement as even more provocative, where any notion of the body as a vessel for discourses is renounced (Sastre 941).

Both Gibson's and Sastre's findings indicate a discrepancy in the movement's objective and the conveyed message of the posts associated with body-positivity. Their findings will contribute to the research conducted in this thesis, as it will assess the role of the social media platforms themselves in the discrepancy of their conveyed discourses, or how the movement's use of social media platforms possibly affects the movement's conveyed message. Additionally, as mentioned above, many scholars within the field of Fat Studies mainly focus on the potential of new media and regard the Internet as a space for fat liberation, but in doing so, they fail to question the liability of the platform they use to carry out their message. This thesis outlines the debate on online media and its potential for citizen participation, but also addresses its limitations. In doing so, it will position itself within this debate, and provide a much needed critical perspective on the social media platforms in relation to the Body Positivity Movement, as it will focus on how the affordances of the social media platforms the movement situates themselves on allow for specific kinds of online behavior, what discourses this produces, and how those discourses align with or conflict with the movement's objective.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 The Debate on New Media and Citizen Participation

Much has been written within media and communication studies about the Internet and digital communication technologies as a new platform for citizen participation and online activism. In order to assess how social media platforms affect the production of discourse by the Body Positivity Movement as a form of online activism, this chapter will outline the academic debate on the potential and limitations of digital media in citizen participation and online activism, in order to assess the possibilities of online activism and the limitations which it meets.

3.1.1 Online Participation

Sonia Livingstone explains the shift from live audience to mass audience to the diffused audience of digital media technologies as a change in audience conception(2005, 26). The audience's gain in agency distinguishes the current media landscape from the preceding era, as new digital media technologies enable interactive participation from the viewer in relation to the medium (Livingstone 2003, 353-354). As Livingstone argues, new media technologies call for a revision on the concept of audience, as the digital technologies enable more individualistic and interactive forms of engagement (2003, 353-354), and liberate the audience from physical chains, diffusing the traditional mass, as they are no longer bound to a place and time (2005, 26). Instead, she opts for the term *user* to fully account for this new individualistic, interactive relation to information and communication technologies (Livingstone 2003, 352-354).

This shift in audience conception, henceforth defining the audience through their interactive participation, illustrates the potential digital information and communication technologies pose for new forms of media consumption and convention, not only of acquiring information, but of content creation as well. Minna Aslama Horowitz and Philip M. Napoli see this as the 'participatory turn' in media system evolution, where the interactive usage of new media allows for more citizen participation (310-311). This, in turn, would then result in a more democratized media landscape where more divers ideas and point of views are represented, compared to the traditional media system, where participation in meaningful conversation was limited to a small elite (Horowitz and Napoli 310-311).

The potential of digital communication technologies is for its users to be able to participate in the communication act itself, holding the promise for an online space for meaningful conversation. Jurgen Habermas theorizes this space as the *public sphere*, with which he refers to an

open space independent of government and autonomous from economic forces, rendering it impartial, committed to rational debate and meaningful, political conversation (36). Jürgen Gerhards and Mike S. Schäfer state that the Internet functions as a forum for citizens to read about and converse on important issues, and, when comprised of a wide variety of information and perspectives, it would even enable citizens to exercise control over the socio-political-economical elite (Gerhards and Schäfer 2).

Manuel Castells theorizes the importance of communication technologies for citizen participation in the public sphere. He stresses the importance of access to media space to challenge dominant power structures, as the media play an important role in forming people's opinions (Castells 2007, 238-246). As Castells states: “The way people think determines the fate of norms and values on which societies are constructed” (Castells 2007, 238). It is here where he sees the significance of new digital communication technologies. As opposed to the traditional media, broadcasting a one-way message from one to many, digital communication media produce a networked society of global, horizontal communication (Castells 2007, 246). Through the networked society arises a new form of social communication from many to many (Castells 2007, 248). Castells names this *mass self-communication*, as it is self-generated, self-directed and self-selected in information communication (Castells 2007, 248). Characterized as interactive and connective, online media then enable citizens to participate, giving them direct access to the media space (Castells 2007, 246).

However, this potential new media technologies, the Internet in particular, propose does not go undebated. As pointed out by Livingstone, optimists laud the Internet's potential for new practices of producing and consuming media content in this open media space, while more pessimistic scholars criticize the Internet as hierarchical, commercial and closed off (2003, 355). It is this debate that I will touch upon in this chapter in order to contextualize my research of the Body Positivity Movement as an online activist movement. Through this framework, I will assess how the movement utilizes the Internet's potential for obtaining information, content creation and social mobilization on social network sites. Additionally, this framework provides a critical point of view, addressing the limitations of the medium itself and how this possibly affects the movement's activity on the online platform. Finally, addressing this debate will enable me to situate my own stance within this debate through my analysis of the Body Positivity Movement on social media.

As it provides citizens with easy access to participate in political conversation, the Internet seems the ideal medium to offer (virtual) ground for the public sphere. However, this optimistic viewpoint is much debated. Henrik Serup Christensen outlines various points of praise and criticism concerning the Internet as a platform for socio-political citizen participation. According to

Christensen, this debate was induced by the Internet not reaching its expectation of changing democratic participation for all citizens, and even more, changing the ways of democracy itself, resulting in many scholars taking a skeptical stance towards the new medium and its socio-political impact (Christensen).

The first point of criticism refutes to the notion of the Internet as a new virtual space for socio-political engagement. Not only is the Internet as a mediated platform understood as unsuited for socio-political engagement, as the medium was originally mostly regarded in terms of its entertainment use (Christensen). Additionally, as Livingstone argues, it is believed the Internet cannot provide a platform for healthy socio-political discussion, as it lacks notions of authenticity and reliability that are associated with face-to-face communication (2005, 18). Most notably, this point of criticism aimed at online political participation condemns the Internet for a decline in citizen's socio-political engagement (Christensen). This point of critique not only disputes the notion of the Internet as an online public sphere, but blames the online medium of as causing a decline in socio-political participation offline as well.

Additionally, a variety of studies show that the Internet's vast provision of information does not necessarily lead to better informed citizens, nor does it result in a broader inclusion of a variety in participating actors or perspectives (Reed 123; Gerhards and Schäfer 6, 13). This point of critique argues that the Internet does not necessarily provide a new, accessible means for active socio-political participation on behalf of those previously inactive, but rather functions as a new tool for those who are already actively engaged in political matters, meaning the Internet would not lead to more diverse participation or more variety in perspectives (Christensen).

A last form of critique on the Internet as a space of meaningful, political communication, is that the user's access to information is limited in various ways, the first of which is access to the medium as a whole. As mentioned above, the Internet is intrinsic to the process of neoliberal globalization, and, as is often the case with the way capitalism operates, creates creates structures of socio-economical inequalities (Lister et al. 182, 185). This digital divide emanates and builds on various systems of inequality, such as income, race, gender and physical location (Lister et al. 185), questioning whether we can speak of global interconnectedness, when structurally marginalized groups are often excluded from online participation. Moreover, according to this line of critique, the Internet may in fact strengthen existing differences, as the privileged class have access to technological advantages (Christensen).

Secondly, those who are able to participate, will not necessarily come in contact with a wide variety of different opinions, views or perspectives, but are rather faced with content reaffirming their own beliefs and biases. The term 'filter bubble' Filterbubblerefers to the processes of website algorithms that place the user in a positive feedback loop: based on the content the user shows

interest in, other content of a similar nature will be recommended to them, reaffirming their own beliefs in a vicious circle, and closing them off to new ideas and information (Bozdag 218). T.V. Reed supports this, and refers to the *Sunstein Thesis* to explain how most Internet users do not look up different perspectives, but are rather informed by sources that reaffirm their own beliefs (123). Moreover, she argues that this tendency, reinforced by algorithms, can lead to polarization of perspectives as the user becomes more intense in their beliefs (Reed 123).

Lastly, even if the user choses to indulge in alternative sources of information, those sources might be hard to find. Content provided by independent online news sources and individual social actors, as Gerhard and Schäfer state, often fall victim to search engine mechanisms based on interconnectedness of individual websites (13-14). As opposed to larger institutionalized actors who can link their websites to each other to increase their Google ranking, smaller, independent actors have more difficulty constructing such a network of linked sources (Gerhard and Schäfer 13-14). This is problematic because, "[in] this way, search engines might actually silence societal debate by giving more space to established actors and institutions, to experts and to expert evaluations and views, thereby replicating pre-existing power structures online" (Gerhard and Schäfer 13-14). As the search engine is an indispensable tool for the average user to find content, a wide variety of sources and perspectives remains a float in the unnavigable vast space of the world wide web. (Gerhard and Schäfer 13-14).

Critics characterize the Internet as an unreliable space for political engagement, with limited access for some citizens. Furthermore, they see it as causing a polarization of views and a decline in political engagement. However, other scholars refute these points of critique, and rather characterize the Internet by emphasizing its potential for socio-political participation. Many scholars claim the Internet does not cause a decline in socio-political engagement, but rather offers more variety in the possibilities of engagement (Christensen). The Internet provides a spectrum of new, creative forms of engagement and socio-political expression that, although they differ greatly from the traditional forms, are nonetheless forms of socio-political participation (Christensen; Reed 124). Castells supports this, as he states that through the Internet's key feature of interactive communication, users are able to recombine information, produce information and communicate feedback, endlessly, and thusly producing new forms of engagement that vary greatly, from art creation to globally networked movements (Castells 2004, 11).

In addition to this, not only does the Internet provide a greater variety in possibilities to be politically active, but a greater variety in active citizens as well, as the online medium's easy accessibility allows for more people to become engaged. Gerhards and Schäfer state that the Internet is understood as potentially enabling more citizens to be social-politically active, including

those who were not active before, which also leads to a greater variety in interpretations and point of views to be represented in the media (3). This in turn shows the hope of the Internet as presenting more diverse perspectives, including perspectives that were underrepresented in traditional media, as those who do not have access to traditional media can now make use of the Internet to let their voices be heard (Gerhards and Schäfer 4). It is this aspect of the Internet where I see its great potential for the participation of marginalized identities, as it will enable them to participate in socio-political conversation and represent themselves on issues that concern them.

Although the exact impact of the Internet on citizen engagement cannot be determined yet, it is too early to refute either side of this discussion (Christensen). Moreover, Christensen states that "[online] and off–line participation are not necessarily mutually exclusive forms of citizen engagement," meaning online citizen participation can perfectly exist simultaneously to offline citizen participation, without the former having a negative impact on the latter. Whether or not the Internet lives up to its promised potential on citizen participation, may be a forever-ongoing debate. However, I think it is important to note the significant strive forwards compared to previous communication structures. The current media landscape is characterized by user participation, through which users are able to not only consume, but create content in communication media. Furthermore, with the development of new, portable media technologies and the emergence of new social media applications, the production of user-generated content continues to develop in new, creative ways.

3.1.2 Online Activism

This debate on the potential and the disadvantages of online citizen participation translates to act of online activism as well. As Castells notes, the rise of digital communication technologies enables users to actively and interactively participate in online conversation, which makes it an exceptional medium for social movements to confront and subvert dominant power structures (2007, 249). Yet, various concerns emerge concerning this form of online engagement.

According to Christensen, recent forms of criticism against online participation argue that the activities have little or no impact on political policy making, and are even leading citizens away from 'more effective' forms of socio-political commitment. The easy accessibility of the Internet enabling citizens to partake in political activities would not lead to an improvement of political participation, but rather induce simpler forms of political engagement (Christensen). Such criticism labels online activism as *slacktivism,* describing these actions as supporting a socio-political cause with little effort or involvement (Franklin). The term, originally pitched by Fred Clark to describe bottom up activities with an outcome on a personal scale, is used to refer to online activism in a derogatory way, as not being fully committed to the political cause (Christensen). The most notable

form of critique of slacktivism questions the lack of desire of its participants to be more actively engaged, as it requires low effort to be political involvement online (Christensen). Moreover, the impact of online activism on real-life decision-making is questioned, not only because of its little effort, but also because the online networks are often disconnected from political institutions (Christensen).

Additionally, online activism is accused of causing a deterioration of 'more effective' forms of activism. It is proven that the easy access to information the Internet provides, does not lead to an increase in political participation in the offline world (Christensen). Additionally, critics fear that online activities will replace offline forms of activism, as participants see it as a sufficient replacement, leading not only to a deterioration in quality of participation, but in the effects of political outcomes as well (Christensen).

However, Christensen notes that some of this criticism is overrated (Christensen). Even though the Internet does not facilitate more offline participation, it is not proven to have a negative effect either, suggesting that this critique is unsubstantiated (Christensen). Furthermore, many offline political acts require little effort as well, and are not necessarily more efficient (Christensen). M.I. Franklin, substantiates this, in stating that low-effort political engagement has existed long before, and will exist long after the Internet (Franklin). Franklin notes that 'lazy' forms of activism are not unique to the online sphere alone, and such a view merely reduces the act itself with the technological medium (Franklin). Equating all forms of online activism and online participation as slacktivism fails to acknowledge the more complex nature of online participation and digital technologies. Additionally, Franklin states that offline forms of activism are not necessarily superior to online forms of activism, and, if anything, this view overlooks the notion that online mobilization is an undertaking that is both labor- and time consuming, even if many of the online tools used for this are easy to use and easy to come by (Franklin). Therefore, a term better suited to refer to low effort forms of political engagement would be micro-activism, a form of small scale political communication, with communication flows from many to many (Christensen). More importantly, various scholars underscore the importance of new digital media tools to support and enhance offline forms of activism. The Internet provides activist movements with new tools to help mobilize and organize their movements (Christensen). Reed makes a similar observation, and states that these new forms of activism do not replace, but enhance traditional forms of activism through new forms of organization (128-131). Franklin even stresses that at present, for any project addressing social injustice, the Internet has become a necessary resource (Franklin).

In addition to this, Franklin also points out how criticism aimed at online forms of activism, describing it as slacktivism, often derive from a derogatory view on younger generations, how they

use media and communication technologies, and how they choose to communicate on socio-political topics (Franklin).

> "Like its corollary clicktivism, slacktivism is a term that unites entrenched technosceptics and romantic revolutionaries from a pre-Internet or, more precisely, a pre-social media age as they admonish younger generations for their lack of commitment to "real" social change or willingness to do "what it takes" to make the world around them a better place" (Franklin).

The newer generations have become digital natives, as navigating themselves through the online world and communicating their concerns online feels natural to them, as opposed to a generation of older, traditional activists, discounting the new forms of activism as less authentic and limited (Reed 130). Online networks better facilitate the socio-political engagement of younger generations, as digital communication technologies facilitate informal networks and non-traditional forms of protest, and allow local activists to link their cause to various movements situated all over the world through a global network. These new movements not only relate to economic structures, but cultural as well, as online activism actively situates itself within the terrain of cultural identities, defending those who are marginalized (Feixa et al. 423, 427; Castells 2007, 248-249). Disapproval of the younger generation's behavior and the accompanying longing for yesteryear is a process that has always been in place, and draws attention away from the underlying process of the changing nature of socio-political engagement,where society and technological innovations are intertwined with one another (Franklin).

One of the innovative characteristics of the Internet is its networking infrastructure, which is strongly linked to informational capitalism. The globalization of capital resulted in local movements to become globally networked, just as the neoliberal system they wish to subvert, but rather place an emphasis on the local in its relation to the international (Feixa et al. 426-427). In becoming a 'glocal' network, they work to uncover the social conflicts linked to informational capitalism (Feixa et al. 426-427), and in doing so, they become part of the very system, neoliberal globalization, they wish to critique. Jeffrey Juris uses the term *cultural logic of networking* to comprehend how online movements are not only shaped by, but also internalize the networking logic of informational capitalism (341-342). This networking logic involves building horizontal, heterogeneous connections; open circulation of information; decentralized, coordination and democratic organization; autonomous networking (Juris 342). According to Juris, the Internet not only provides

social movements with technological tools for networking, but it mirrors and reinforces their form of organization (349). Reed also states that it is the Internet's central characteristic of networking, and networking as a major form of organizing activist movements is what creates a natural affinity between the Internet and social movements (128-129). Juris expands on this, drawing a stronger connection between the networking characteristic of both social movements and the Internet, and the internal logic of informational capitalism in which they are rooted (349). He states that the paramount organizational forms of social movements, being decentralized, flexible, and relating the local to the global through networking, reflect the central logic of informational capitalism, and illustrates this by referring to the flexible, dispersed and horizontal networking organization of newer feminist, ecological and student movements (Juris 349).

Juris takes a too optimistic stance on the potential the network-based structure the Internet provides, seeing the new network capabilities of online movements as mirroring a cultural and political ideal (355). He goes on to state that networks offer new cultural models for reconstructing socio-political structures, viewing network-based, glocal online movements as "democratic laboratories" in that they create new political forms and norms better suited for the era of information technologies (Juris 357).

In response to this, I argue that referring to online movements as revolutionary, merely for their network-based structure and use of the Internet should not go unquestioned, as it demonstrates a risks of falling into technological determinism, in a similar way as writing off all forms of online activism as ineffective slacktivism. Reed acknowledges the complexity of the relation between the medium and the form of activism: she states that political impact does not automatically arise from digital technologies providing easy access to the online public sphere, but rather depends on how the new technologies are utilized (125). Just because a form of activism is online, does not mean it is in itself democratically groundbreaking, as, on the flip side, online media can be utilized by those wishing to impose and reinforce dominant power structures as well (Reed 125-126, 131). The matter of an increase or decrease in political participation as a result of digital technologies, depends on how and by whom the technology is used and to what cause (Reed 140). "The point is that communication devices are communication devices, not revolutionary in themselves" (Reed 126). To attribute online activism merely to the platform, is to disregard the efforts and importance of the people and their ideas who are the force behind it.

Moreover, it is important to assess to what extent the platforms to what extent the platform may even limit or impact the undertakings of online activist movements. As this thesis argues, it is important to not assume a medium's neutrality, but rather question the medium's ties to oppressive ideological systems and reveal how it is embedded in larger power structures. As Juris already

acknowledges, online activism utilizes digital technologies that find its roots in informational capitalism and neoliberal globalization. However, he fails to question how the medium's ties to oppressive ideological systems affect online activist movements, as they situate themselves on a platform emanating from the very system they wish to subvert. It is important not to assume the medium's neutrality, as it limits or influences the user's perception of and interaction with the medium. The same should go for the way the medium relates to neoliberalism, as it necessary to question whether a platform based on oppressing power structures can uphold neutrality, or whether it can be used to subvert these same power structures. Evgeny Morozov states that online activism is often dependent on large, commercial institutions who govern the online platforms (213). For the activists, this poses a cause of concern, as their activist content is often in violation with the terms of use of those platforms as it deems the content as too offensive, prohibiting the activists from posting freely (Morozov 216). The online activists are then placed in a dilemma of either being active on a commercial platform with less control, or moving to an independent platform with a significantly smaller audience, in which they often choose they former (Morozov 216).

In her book *Ambiguities of Activism*, Ingrid Hoofd takes a critical stance towards online activism's use of digital technologies so deeply rooted within a neoliberal structure. Hoofd problematizes the way activists view and use new technologies, stating that new media activism relies on new media technologies as an “essential accelerating element of precisely that tool indispensable to the neoliberal capitalist system it claims to subvert” (27). Moreover, she argues that online activist initiatives not only fail to subvert neoliberal discourses, they actually reiterate and produce them in their use of digital communication technologies (Hoofd 31-33).

Firstly, she explains how the globalization of left wing activism is tied to neoliberal globalization. She sees an entangled relation in the simultaneous emergence of new activist practices and the globalization of the neoliberal market (Hoofd 26). “The activist aspiration or compulsion to globalise left-wing activism through new technologies is a product of and reproducing the increasing reach of neoliberal globalisation, and in particular of globalisation's obsession with (the tools of) speed” (Hoofd 27). Digital communication technologies are intrinsic to the system of neoliberalism, and in utilizing these new technologies for their promising potential of immediate, non-hierarchal, global communication, online activism reiterates neoliberalistic notions. As of such, anything produced through new media activism will wrapped up in what Hoofd calls the “speed-elitist logic” (28).

Moreover, online activists falsely believe to be outside of the neoliberal system, and claim to be using these digital tools to subvert it. Hoofd sees this as an illusion, and, more importantly, states that it is online activism's claim to be autonomous that makes them accessory to the system of neoliberal globalization (30). The desire to be emancipated and politically engaged is already

inherently a neoliberal notion. Hoofd states that participation through technology reproduces the very notion of technology as a progressive tool that is fundamental to neoliberal capitalism, and sees politics as a key element in neoliberal production and circulation of knowledge, making online activism subservient to speed-elitism (28, 30). The very notions of the liberating potential assigned to online media reiterate neoliberal discourses, and online political participation through online activism is a result of that very mechanism (Hoofd 31, 33). Therefore, online activists situating themselves online platforms and using the tools of digital technologies cannot subvert the neoliberal system they wish to oppose, as they themselves utilize the tools of neoliberal capitalism and through this, reiterate the neoliberal discourse.

In conclusion, it is clear that digital communication technologies produce a wide variety of conceptions, either celebrating its potential for citizen participation, or approaching it with caution. Even though critics characterize online activism as lazy or without impact compared to traditional forms of activism, I rather argue in favor the wide variety on possibilities that digital media holds for forms of activism, and the new, innovative ways of performing activism that derive from it. Not only does the Internet allow for new topics of activism as new groups are able to connect online, its tool allows activists to produce new, creative forms of activism that were unimaginable before. The potential of new media platforms lies in activists using these tools for new innovative and creative ways of activism. That being said, it remains important to question the reliability of online activism on these platforms, as, as Morozov and Hoofd point out, they are embedded in bigger, repressive power structures.

What does this entail for the Body Positivity Movement and their activism on social media? The movement utilizes online media to upload their point of view and let their voice be heard. But can such a movement have an actual impact on normative notions? Additionally, they situate themselves on social media platforms that normally maintain and reinforce the beauty ideals they wish to oppose. Are they in their use of these platforms also, subconsciously, producing the same problematic discourses, maintaining those power relations? This theoretical framework provides this thesis with a variety of perspectives. This is of aid in the analysis to account for the potential digital media offer for online activist movements such as the Body Positivity Movement, while simultaneously keeping in mind the various shortcomings it has in regards to impact, authenticity and independence.

3.2 Online Self-Representation

The selfie took the world by storm, the social media hype of posting a self-portrait even becoming so popular, The Oxford Dictionaries proclaimed it as word of the year in 2013. The act of taking and posting a selfie might be the most well-known conception of how social media is used. It exemplifies how social media platforms are used to communicate, and specifically how it is used to communicate the image we see of ourselves or how we want to be seen. However, apart from communicating a self-image, self-representation online can entail much more, as it, consciously or subconsciously, conveys discourses and counter-discourses. It is here were the power of self-representation on social media lies for activist movements concerned with identity politics: the representation of one's (marginalized) identity embodies a representation of political discourses. This chapter will focus on what self-representation on social media entails, and, more importantly, how this can be a powerful tool for online activism to subvert dominant discourses. This theoretical framework will support the analysis of how the Body Positivity Movement uses self-representation on the social media platforms Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and blogs to spread their message through their own bodily representations, and in doing so, counter dominant discourses on beauty ideals.

3.2.1 The Presentation of the Self

In his book The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman expands on this idea of how self-presentation influences others' conception of you. Within the play of interpreting others' identities, there are two roles: that of the individual presenting themselves, which here will be referred to as the 'performer,' and that of the individual gazing upon them, here to be referred to as the 'spectator.' The performer presents themselves, though not necessarily on stage or in a theatrical manner, but rather as soon as they enter the presence of others (Goffman 1956, 1). The spectator then views upon the performer, and makes an assessment on their identity based on the physical appearance that is presented to them (Goffman 1956, 2). Goffman argues that certain aspects of the performer's physical appearance, that what he calls 'sign-vehicles,' convey signs that the spectator translates through semiotic conventions in order to make sense of the performer's appearance, and most notably, their identity (1956, 8, 13). Goffman uses the concept of 'the personal front' to refer to the components of the performer's physical appearance that to the spectator seem attached to the performer's identity, such as age, race, sex, clothing and physical gestures (1956, 14-15). These bodily characteristics convey signs that the spectator uses to translate the performer's appearance into specific ideas or notions on their identity. Goffman goes on to argue that the performer can take advantage of these semiotic conventions in his appearance to purposefully influence the spectator's

impression of him by emphasizing certain identity markers to depict aspects that otherwise would remain hidden (1956, 2, 19-20). The performer is then able to influence other's conception of him by expressing themselves in a way that is in accordance with his intentions (Goffman 1956, 2-3). Self-presentation is then understood as a kind of performance: an activity carried out by an individual to influence his observers and their conception of him (Goffman 1956, 8, 13). This performance can be purposefully executed to steer the spectators into a specific direction of interpretation. This is where Goffman's theory of the presentation of the self becomes interesting for activist movements relating to identity politics: self-presentation can purposefully be used to denounce or subvert negative notions or stereotypes of marginalized bodies and identities.

Umberto Eco supports Goffman's theory, stating that physical features operate as sign -vehicles that can be translated through social conventions to make an interpretation of the person's identity (110). Eco then uses the concept of 'ostension' to refer to process of signification where one object comes to stand as a representative or model for an entire category or class (110-111). When physical features operate as sign-vehicles, the signs associated with specific bodily characteristics come to represent the whole of people with those characteristics, putting people in boxes as to categorize them all under one denominator. One negative outcome of this, is that negative stereotypes on certain physical characteristics or body types are then ascribed to everyone carrying those physical features. However, this can be counter-acted in the same way, where, for instance, one Instagram picture of a body-positive feminist and the signs it conveys can come to represent plus-sized people, disabled people, or people of color as a whole. This then underscores the importance of online activist movements related to marginalized identities, such as the Body Positivity Movement, as their social media posts can possibly change the negative image of these identities for the better, by either disproving them, or by setting a new example.

However, this is merely one hypothetical way in which online self-representation can be beneficial to online activism, which I will dive further into later. To be able to make a full account of how self-representation on social media can be used as a means to online activism as with the Body Positivity Movement, it is important to first establish how different social media platforms and tools can be used for self-presentation and how this can convey signs.

3.2.2 But First, Let Me Take a Selfie

The selfie is the most recognizable form of self-representation on online media platforms, as it literally provides the observer with a picture of oneself. As of such, it is even theorized as a continuation of self-portraiture (Tifentale 8, 11). Nonetheless, the act of taking selfies is not uncriticized, as many relate it to narcissism (Tifentale 5). One of those critics is Brooke Wendt, who, in her book The Allure of the Selfie, accuses the selfie for a causing loss of meaningful self-

reflection (24). The simple and quick act of taking a selfie and posting it, shortens the time needed to create a self-portrait, time used for self-reflection (Wendt 24). Consequently, the selfie-taker only views upon themselves as a surface object, with no space for self-contemplation (Wendt 24). She goes on to argue that posting selfies works as personal validation, and the 'likes' one receives for posting work as compliments, buying into the notion of social media use as narcissisticly-driven (Wendt 27). Lastly, she formulates a critique on the filters used to edit the selfies on the app Instagram as it it prioritizes aesthetics over identity (Wendt 30). She accuses the filter function of erasing facial features that she states are essential to the user's identity, and borrowing an aesthetic from the past, presenting an disinterest in their own time (Wendt 27, 30).

Jill Walker Rettberg acknowledges another form of criticism on the act of taking selfies, but then directed towards the stereotypical selfie-taker, namely young women (17). The mocking and ridicule of young women through this stereotype functions as yet another form of disciplinary actions directed towards young women (Rettberg 17). According to Rettberg, women are conditioned to hide and not to draw attention to themselves (18). It is therefore no surprise that criticism directed towards social media use such as selfies and blogging often comes in the form of accusations of narcissism and exhibitionism in regards to women expressing themselves online (Rettberg 18). “It is striking that when young women in their teens and early twenties for the first time have found platforms that allow them to speak without censorship to large public audiences, society’s kneejerk reaction is to mock them” (Rettberg 18). Rettberg reveals that this ridicule is used as a disciplinary tool to women's self-expression to control who has the right to speak publicly (Rettberg 18).

Additionally, not all users of social media are allowed equal use or self-expression. Magdalena Olszanowski supports this, as she argues that women's experience is marginalized through inconsistent censorship on Instagram (2015, 229-231). In addition to this, Rettberg argues that certain social conventions exist on how to present yourself on social media, which maintain a certain cultural filter on what kind of presentations are acceptable and which are not (24-25). These conventions condition users to confirm to the ideal neoliberal subject of a person who devotes themselves to their appearance and self-improvement (Rettberg 23-25). Moreover, Rettberg argues that social media maintain a certain filter, filtering out those users that do not portray the ideal, presenting a (online) reality in which some are excluded (23).

These forms of critique question the act of taking selfies, and indicate a response of ridicule and suppression of those who partake in the act. However, some attribute a more positive potential of the selfie as a new means of communication. In their vast research on the selfie, Alise Tifentale and Lev Manovich acknowledge a more diverse description of the selfie, and describe it as not a mere

symptom of narcissism or a cry for attention, but also as a new form of self-expression, a new form of visual communication, and a new form of expressing one's identity in relation to a community (2014, 6). The selfie is a product of its time and exists to be shared on social network platforms, as a networked camera allows for immediate broadcasting through social networks, attributing meta data like geotags and hashtags. and obtaining likes from followers (Tifentale and Manovich 2014, 8).

Rettberg counters Wendt's argument, stating that the selfie actually allows for self-reflection and self-creation, as it is an act of self-representation with the purpose for others to read and interpret (12). Tifentale supports this, stating that selfies are - like other forms of photography - used to express or perform a certain image of oneself and present this to others (9). Various properties of the selfie, such as facial expression, physical gestures, clothing and surroundings can attribute to conveying a specific image the self (Tifentale 9), and can be used to influence the way others see you. This coincides with Goffman's theory of how the presentation of the self, through the use of bodily sign-vehicles, influences others' perception of one's identity (1956, 2, 19, 20). It is this semotic potential of bodily sign-vehicles that is of importance in the performance of the self in selfies, as it allows users to convey a certain image of themselves to their followers. Manovich uses the term “strategic image” to refer to such images that are used for strategic intentions, such as conveying a specific impression (27). Moreover, as the user is both the object of the image and the photographer, they have more control over how they want themselves to be represented. In her article on the representation of race in southern celebrities' selfies, Iqani supports this, arguing that the selfie enables the user to be fully in control of the image, and, through a mediation of mobile technology and social media platforms, the selfie can convey an image of ourselves we want to share to others (174-176).

Furthermore, Iqani's analysis shows that selfies can convey counter-discourses to dominant discourses, such as beauty standards (163). Not only is this a significant parallel to the Body Positivity Movement, as will become clear in the following analysis, but, more importantly, it also shows that selfies can be used as a powerful tool for marginalized identities for reclaiming power in taking control of how you are represented. Additionally, Iqani states that the selfie can also be a means to regain control on how you are looked upon. The southern female celebrities of her analysis present themselves as active “selves”, as opposed to “passive others” as such marginalized identities are often viewed (Iqani 182). The selfie then has the potential of becoming a political tool in changing the way marginalized identities are represented and understood. In her book Selfie Citizenship Adi Kuntsman acknowledges this political potential of the selfie, and sees activist selfies conveying acts of protest and social statements as a new genre, which is in stark contrast with the stereotypical view of selfies as narcissistic (14). She refers to this phenomenon as 'selfie citizenship,' which merges entertainment and celebrity culture with politics, and problematizes

assumed relations between the body, visibility and politics (Kuntsman 14, 16, 17). The use of selfies can therefore be seen as a form of social capital (Kuntsman 17). Debra Ferreday sees the selfie as a potential for activism as well, as it provides the activist with a platform to speak out on their terms (129). Ferreday adds to this that those speaking out are often policed and disciplined through threats and hate, showing that new media not only provide a space for testimony, but victimization and silencing as well (133).

3.2.3 Hashtagging Identity

Apart from the post itself, whether it is a photo or text, another tool through which self-representation on social media platforms can be done is the hashtag, a keyword accompanying the post that both functions as a description of the post and a form of metadata through which it is archived. According to Olszanowski, the hashtag has four different functions for which it can be used (2015, 234-235). The first of which is that the hashtag allows users to come into contact with like minded peers outside of the user's followers (2015, 234). Their single post then becomes part of a bigger conversation of which other users can easily contribute through the use of the same hashtag (Olszanowski 2015, 234). Secondly, users are able to find inspiration on the platform by using the hashtag as a search term, accommodating them with a vast stream of posts on the same topic, which can inspire them to create similar posts themselves (Olszanowski 2015, 236). This is also apparent from the third function Olszanowski ascribes to the hashtag, which is that it allows users to compete in hashtag-based challenges (2015, 235). Lastly, Olszanowski states that the hashtag has an archival function, where it is used to attribute a label to a post or picture, to bring posts with similar content together (2015, 236).

Olszanowski's description of the hashtag paints it as a useful tool, but not all are that supportive of its use. Wendt criticizes the use of the hashtag, arguing that not only is it used by users to gain more visibility, but also that an image posted with a hashtag loses meaning and complexity as it provides the viewer with a simplistic understanding of the picture (Wendt 32-33). Wendt argues that the hashtag would prohibit the viewer from obtaining a contemplative relation to the image or assess its complex layers (Wendt 33, 37). However, this thesis argues that this view attributes a too simplistic account of the hashtag's role in self-representation online, and its organizational and signifying potential. As opposed to inducing a simplification of the interpretation of the posted image, the hashtag can add significance to the post that would otherwise have remained unrecognized, especially in the fast-pace media consumption of scrolling through one's feed.

Brock's analysis of #BlackTwitter supports this, as he states that the hashtag adds significance to the tweet on various levels: firstly, the hashtag marks the significance of the tweet, secondly, the hashtag provides a cultural context through which the tweet can be interpreted, and

lastly the tweet becomes part of a broader conversation, through which the hashtag becomes a invitation to respond (2012, 537). The selfies posted by the Body Positivity Movement illustrate this characteristic of the hashtag as adding significance. By using the hashtag #bodypositivity, it becomes apparent that the selfie is posted with a specific intent, namely challenging normative beauty ideals. Without the hashtag, this intent would have remained unclear, and the image would appear a mere selfie, but with the hashtag, the selfie obtains a socio-political significance.

Additionally, as Olszanowski argues, the hashtag serves a community-function, creating an online space of specific publics (2015, 229, 234). The hashtag can be used to form a community, identify with a community and allows users to become part of a community (Wendt 31). More over, a social media post, photo or hashtag can be used to express one's identity as belonging to a specific public, or, as Tifentale states, “a wish to belong to one” (11). The hashtag then becomes an identity indicator in relation to a community, group or subculture. According to Manovich, social media users can use specific visual characteristics to represent their membership of a certain subculture to represent their identity and lifestyle (40). Rettberg makes a similar argument, as she states that a profile picture represents not necessarily one's individual identity, but one's relation to a social group (40). In the case of representing the self as part of a community, the performance of the self is then simultaneously an private act and a public act, where the “individual and unique #me becomes part of #us” (Tifentale 11-12). According to Olszanowski, this is in particular of significance for marginalized women, and as this thesis will show, other marginalized identities (2015, 234). Brock's research into #BlackTwitter, exemplifies this as well, as it demonstrates how this hashtag constructs a community on Twitter of African Americans (2012, 530).

3.2.4 Self-representation as Online Activism

Several of the characteristics of online self-representation listed above can be utilized by online activism. The first of which is the possibility to form communities online. Through online media, some marginalized identities can find one another and form communities, express their identity as being part of that group, and express their experiences as being part of that group. Anna Antonakis-Nashif adds to this, stating that the hashtag not only allows for marginalized groups to participate in socio-political conversation, it can also add another level of significance to the post (101-102). Firstly, the individual post is a representation of someone's personal experience, and, secondly, the hashtag signifies a tie to a unifying message (Antonakis-Nashif 105). The post is then simultaneously an individual post, and part of a collective conversation (Antonakis-Nashif 105). Through the hashtag, personal stories and experiences can become part of a larger conversation, where the personal becomes political. Andre Brock's research on #BlackTwitter, a hashtag used on Twitter by certain people of color, exemplifies this aspect. Through the use of this hashtag on social

media, the users were able to form a community, creating alternative discourses differing from the mainstream (Brock 2012, 530). Brock goes on to argue that the hashtag has a triple function: it has meaning on its own, it provides the cultural context from which the post is to be understood, and it is a call for a response as the hashtag indicates the topic of a conversation (Brock 2012, 537).

But more importantly, Brock's research shows that twitter is assumed as a white space. Black twitter becoming trending as a disruption of that space: black twitter then seen as something special, but why would it be special for black folks to use twitter? Most notably, however, Brock stresses how the emergence of #BlackTwitter in popular conversation disrupts the notion of a white space (Brock 2012, 538). He argues that the Internet is a social structure centered on Western culture and ideology (Brock 2012, 531-532). Twitter is understood as a "White pubic space," which made the existence of Black Twitter all the more significant (Brock 2012, 538). Where the use of Twitter by white people was not even questioned or brought in relation to their ethnicity, while the same usage by people of color is brought into attention because of ideologies ascribed to these technologies (Brock 2012, 534, 544). Black Twitter is conceived of as something significant, as a black community is not expected within the assumed white virtual space, while it should not come as a surprise that people of color use social media too. But then again, this is what makes #BlackTwitter more significant, as it illustrates how marginalized identities reclaim (virtual) spaces presumed white.

Olszanowski's article on feminist artists on Instagram shows another example of self-representation on social media as a tool for online activism, but interestingly enough one that is directed towards the oppressing and disciplinary policies of the social media platform itself. She refers to several female artists who post their art and photography on Instagram, but are limited by the platform's policies on nudity (Olszanowski 2014, 88). Olszanowski states that Instragram's policies work to reinforce existing hegemonic processes by reiterating binary distinctions of what is deemed appropriate and what is not, which disciplines women's bodies (2014, 84). Olszanowski questions this binary, as it holds an inclination of immorality considering nudity, and assesses how Instagram's policy on bodily representations produce new bodily depictions (2014, 86, 91). This is mostly of significance because it assumes an essential, mutual relationship between acts of self-representation and the social media platform, or as Olszanowski states: "[a] link between imaging technologies and conceptions of the self is at the heart of the ways in which these women use these technologies as tactics that in turn shape their subjectivity (2014, 91).

In the case of these feminist artists, they find new tactics to represent their (nude) bodies while simultaneously subverting Instagram's policies on nudity, through which they challenge normative ideals and ideologies of censorship (Olszanowski 2014, 88). They experiment with the

platform, to find a way to bridge their unconventional use of the platform and the platforms censoring policies (Olszanowski 2014, 88). According to Olszanowski, in this self-imaging practice, the artist becomes both an object of and a threat to the process of image consumption (2014, 84). Tactics used to circumvent Instagram's censorship range from covering the nude body with limbs, or objects, to layering the photo itself with other photos or images (Olszanowski 2014, 89-90). Through these tactics, the feminist artists incorporate reminiscences of censorship as elements of the photo itself (Olszanowski 2014, 90).

Through representing their bodies, they not only create communities where they are allowed to represent themselves in their own terms, and in doing so, create a space on a platform that actively tries to censor them (Olszanowski 2014, 91). Olszanowski refers to this as an “unexpected power in repression” as the artists claim space on a platform where there is no space for them (Olszanowski 2014, 91, 93). In their photos, they do not simply counteract Instagram's policies, but rather create a new imagining practice that simultaneously incorporates and subverts these ideologically-loaded policies in their representation of female, nude bodies (Olszanowski 2014, 93). Olszanowski concludes that, in “playing” with the platform’s policies as opposed to a withdrawal from the contemporary (digital) media landscape, they destabilize its oppressive, disciplinary power, and find new, “unexpected power” in creating new aesthetic forms (2014, 93).

Lastly, self-representation on social media can be used as a tool for online activism to provide new forms of representations of marginalized identities. Two of such movements are the Art Hoe Movement and the Stocky Bodies project. The Stocky Bodies Project is a website set up to provide a stock photo gallery of images presenting fat bodies in a neutral or positive matter. In conventional media and marketing, the negative stereotype of the 'headless fattie' is often used in representing fat bodies, and works to dehumanize people with fat bodies. The Stocky Bodies Project's aim is to counteract this negative trope, and instead provide images that can be used as stock photos that present in a positive way, to humanize the fat body. Lauren Gurrieri, one of the founders of the project, states that images are a powerful tool, as they can disrupt dominant stereotypes and negative tropes in conventional representations (198). The Stocky Bodies Project not only gives back control to fat people in that they themselves decide how they want to be portrayed, but the new representations also have the potential to change the spectator's point of view (Gurrieri 207-208). The Stocky Bodies Project exemplifies how a marginalized group, dissatisfied with their negative representation, takes matters into their own hands through new media technologies, to provide new, positive representations of fat people, to address and denounce negative discourses on fat bodies.

The Art Hoe Movement starts from a similar premise. Dissatisfied with the lack of black female artists and positive representations of women of color in canonical art, the Art Hoe

Movement was created to provide a space for marginalized artists to express themselves. The movement situates itself on visual-based social media platforms, such as Instagram and Tumblr, to create new art by black, queer women, featuring black, queer women. They use social media as a platform to be able to create new representations of black queer women in art outside of the canon. The movement is founded upon the hashtag #arthoe, and social media users can easily contribute to the movement by using that hashtag. However, the use of the hashtag is not limited to the movement's intended demographic. The hashtag #arthoe is appropriated by a group of thin, white girls, to accompany photos centered on expensive clothing (Frizzell). Not only does this present an image of the hashtag that is very exclusive whereas the original movement is aimed at including those who are often excluded (you can only participate if you buy these expensive clothes), but also draws attention away from the original use of the hashtag and its socio-political intent (Frizzell). This is makes apparent the vulnerability of an online movement founded on a hashtag, in a similar way the Body Positivity Movement suffers from a mainstream adaptation of their hashtag.

The Stocky Bodies project and the Art Hoe Movement exemplify how self-representation on online platforms can function as a powerful tool for online activist movements which involve themselves with identity politics, as it not only gives them the means to take back some control on how they want to be represented, but also use this representation to get across their socio-political message.

This chapter set out to assess how self-presentation, and most importantly, self-representation on online platforms can convey discourses, and, more importantly, how this can be utilized in online activism to bring across specific ideas and understandings of the person or group in question, especially in relation to identity politics. It outlines various aspects of social media that can be used to represent a certain identity online, and it assesses how these can function as tools for online activism. Some of these tools include forming communities, carrying out identity markers, or even directly addressing repressive discourses. This framework disproves the idea of the selfie or social media use in general as a mere act of narcissism and individualism, and instead understands self-representation in more complex terms, as it is also beneficial to the formation of communities, the creation of new, long-longed for, representations of marginalized identities, and can stem from a socio-political motivation.

The Body Positivity Movement's use of self-representation on social media platforms exemplifies how online self-representation can function as a form of online activism. Through this framework, the following analysis will show how the movement's use of self-representation online conveys counter-discourses, and more specifically, how they use self-representation as a means to subvert dominant, oppressive discourses on body norms and beauty ideals.

3.3 Probabilities

Social media platforms prove to be of benefit for online activist movements, but this does not address the power the platforms have in the production of discourse, and how this affects the online activist movements. Brock warns for the naive perception of technology as being 'neutral,' as this point of view neglects the pre-existing social hierarchies that influence the production of technologies, and in doing so, maintain their prevalence (2012, 531-532). Both Olszanowski and Tifentale substantiate this, who argue that the technology of contemporary communication simultaneously conveys and produces subjectivities (Olszanowski 2014, 84; Tifentale 10). More importantly, Brock notes how the Internet is a social structure which conveys dominant Western ideology in both its practice and design (2012, 531-532). Online activist movements utilize online platforms for their easy access and networkability, but often do not interact with the question of the neutrality of these platforms. It is therefore important to see how the platform produces discourses in relation to the online activist movements.

Lev Manovich addresses the conventions of social network sites that produce discourses, and refers to this phenomenon as 'probabilities' (53). Manovich explains how conventions of the use of a social media platform produce probabilities by analyzing Instagram and the dominant 'aesthetic' that has come to be on the platform (26). He uses the term probabilities to describe that it is more likely for a social media platform to be used in one specific manner rather than other manners, as it it influenced by social, cultural and aesthetic conventions and values (Manovich 26, 53). This conventional use does not exist outside of signs and codes, but rather often convey existing, dominant discourses. One might even question the role of the infrastructure embedded in these social media platforms on the creation of this online culture of conventions. These conventions are not so much concrete rules, but rather unspoken, established notions of how to use social media:

> “rather than using the term “rules” which implies only two possible behaviors—follow the rule or go against the rules—we may instead think of probabilities. […] Instagram casual photos are more likely—in other words, have higher probability—to show some subjects rather than others, and are also more likely to show these subjects in particular ways in terms of composition, point of view, focus, lighting, etc.” (Manovich 53).

These probabilities then determine what is worth sharing on social media, and how it is to be shared (Manovich 52).

Manovich's analysis assesses Instagram in particular, but each social media platform has its

own probabilities, depending on the technology and software the platform is based on, and how cultural conventions on usage develop from that. He outlines several platforms on their different conventions, differentiating Twitter as a platform for news exchange, Facebook for social communication, and Instagram for aesthetic visual communication (Manovich 41). In addition to this, Rettberg explains how software filters out certain kinds of content from the feed, and gives preference to others (35). This also plays into the user's conception of how to use a specific platform, as one kind of content is continuously provided to them, it makes it harder to imagine other ways of posting on that platform. Tifentale notes how the networked camera played a significant role in the emergence of the selfie as a social media phenomenon, as it allows for an image's immediate distribution through social media networks as Instagram (10-11). Furthermore, Manovich notes that the interface, and the navigational and organizational functions of photo-sharing networks affect photographic conventions (54). Moreover, because of social media's ubiquitous presence and use, a new form of literacy emerges (Tifentale and Manovich 2018, 169). As access to visual culture and its required skills and knowledge are democratized, the ability to communicate through images and photos is becoming a basic dexterity (Tifentale and Manovich 2018, 169). All these technological and cultural aspects contribute to the probabilities of social media networks, as it affects how the platform can be used, and how the user understands the platform can be used.

These probabilities are not accidental phenomena or meaningless recurrences, but are rather carriers of discourse, as they are the result of a normative process of normalizing certain forms of online activity. Additionally, when addressing online self-expression, concepts of capitalism, fetishism, commodification and consumption come to mind, as online self-expression seems inherently linked to the creation of the ideal neoliberal subject.

4. Methodology

In order to analyze the discourses conveyed in the social media posts of the Body Positivity Movement, and the effects of the probabilities of those social media platforms on their posts, I will be using two distinguished methods of Discourse Analysis. Using Discourse Analysis, I will not only be able to disclose both the conservative and subversive discourses presented in body-positive posts, but also to contemplate the signifying role of these social media platforms as the technologies mediating these discourses.

Firstly, I will apply Critical Discourse Analysis, as described by Teun A. van Dijk, Marianne Jorgensen and Louise J. Phillips, to analyze discourses present in the Body Positivity Movement's posts. Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on the ways text reinforce or subvert dominant power structures, making it very suitable for analyzing an online activist movement. As Van Dijk states, Critical Discourse Analysis is a research method that focuses on the way discourse structures enact, reiterate, legitimate and challenge social and political inequalities (466-467). Jorgensen and Phillips support this, as they define Critical Discourse Analysis as a method to analyze the relationship between language use and social practices, focusing on the role of discourse in the maintenance of social order (69-70). More specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis targets the discursive practices that create, maintain and carry out inequalities in power structures (Jorgensen and Phillips 63). In using this method, I will be able to analyze the ways in which the Body Positivity Movement's messages posted on social media relate to, reinforce, or subvert dominant discourses.

More importantly, as Van Dijk explains, Critical Discourse Analysis provides a link between the micro-level of social order, consisting of language, interaction and communication, and the macro-level of social order, consisting of power, dominance and inequality (468). Critical Discourse Analysis thus unveils the intricate relationship between language and communication and greater narratives of socio-political inequalities. By using this method, this thesis will demonstrate the importance of the messages posted by the Body Positivity Movement on social media as a form of online activism, as it is situated within a wider debate on social inequalities.
Additionally, Jorgensen and Phillips state that dominant discourses can be changed through creative use of communication (71-72). Keeping this in mind, it would be interesting to see what dominant discourses the Body Positive movement interacts with, how their use of social media might have a possible change on those discourses, and how this shows the significance of the reach of online activism.

Using this approach, I will look at repetition in imagery and text in the posted content by the

Body Positivity Movement to identify themes that reveal the movement's narrative. Additionally, to account for the visual aspect of some of the social media posts, I will be using the method of semiology to analyze the discourses conveyed in the pictures or videos.

Secondly, I will use Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA), as theorized by André Brock, to identify the role of the probabilities of Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs as social media platforms in the production discourses. Brock defines CTDA as an approach combining a three level of analysis into the technology's material, interface, and the discourses produced by its users (Brock 2016, 2). As Brock explains, CTDA takes into consideration "form, the user, and the interface with an attention to the ideologies that underlie them" (2012, 531). In defining this approach, Brock acknowledges the shaping role the technology itself in technological mediated communication in the production of discourse (Brock 2016, 6). In analyzing any technological form of communication, it is important to take into account the the significance of the technology in that mediation (Brock 2016, 12). The technological platform in online communication is often seen as neutral, but this is far from the truth as it is shaped by social and cultural context, such as conventions on its proper use (Brock 2012, 530-531; Brock 2016, 5, 8-9). Gibson supports this, as she states that "CTDA recognizes that technology is used as a place of social and political power negotiations and seeks to identify how certain platforms facilitate this" (Gibson). CTDA makes an especially significant approach for this research, as it specifically looks into the cultural affordances of a platform, the probabilities, other approaches overlook (Brock 2012, 530-531).

As this method considers the role of the platform in the production of discourse and power relations, and even takes into account the cultural affordances of the platform in the production of discourse, it is highly suited for my research on the production of discourses through the probabilities or conventions of blogs, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube as social media platforms. Using these methods, I will be able to analyze how the posts of the Body Positivity Movement on social media challenge, reiterate or even produce dominant discourses.

Using these methods will benefit me in my research, as discourse analysis is used to disclose power relations and normative notions present in cultural expressions. Additionally, both these methods are very suited for this research topic, as they specifically aim at analyzing (subverting) discourses in relation to power structures and analyzing the role of online platforms in the production of discourses in online communication. That being said, choosing this method of analysis also has its limitations, as it requires a limited body of research material, and in doing so simultaneously including certain objects, while excluding others. For example, my research focuses on the messages posted by the Body Positive Movement within a specific time frame. The contents of

these posts could differ had the research been conducted at an earlier or later point in time. Additionally, analysis of both text, speech and imagery can be very subjective. To take these shortcomings into account during my analysis, the determined the range of the research will be specified in detail below, to ensure no over-generalizing claims are made.

In delving into a substantial movement that has been around for almost a decade (Gibson) and is active on various platforms, I will properly limit my research material to be able to establish an adequate representation of this vast movement. Therefore, I will look into messages posted on four social media platforms: blogs, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. To further my limit my research material, I will look at the content posted on these platforms during a specific time frame, from 07 May 2018 till 13 May 2018, through the use of the hashtag #bodypositivity (with the exemption of the blogs). In doing so, I will be using a similar approach to Melissa Gibson in her research into the Body Positivity Movement, who looks at the use of this and other hashtags on Instagram within a time frame of seven days, in order to asses a discrepancy between the movement's message and the discourses conveyed in the pictures they share on Instagram. In following her method, and expanding on it by looking at various social media platforms, I hope to build on her research, as I will explain further below.

In order to analyze the movement's activity, I will collect a number of messages posted each day on each platform, for a period of seven days. For Instagram, I will look at the top nine posts per day, for Twitter, I will look at ten most recent tweets per day, and for YouTube I will look at the three highest recommended videos per day. I have chosen to limit myself to a lower amount of posts YouTube, as analyzing video content of several minutes is more intense takes more time. More importantly, it needs to be taken into account that uploading videos to YouTube happens with less frequency than posting on Instagram or Twitter, which could affect the volume of research material, differing from day to day. Because of the dispersed nature of the movement, consisting of various individuals and their social media accounts rather than all being active on one account on one platform, I chose to look at messages labeled by the hashtag #bodypositivity to account for this dispersion and not give priority to specific individual accounts. Though there are various hashtags and keywords that can be tied to the Body Positivity Movement, overall there is less consistency in their application, unlike this hashtag, which has become synonymous with the movement.

I chose these specific social media platforms for various reasons. Instagram as a photo-sharing social media platform emphasizes the visual aspect of online communication, which makes it an interesting platform to look at regarding this study, as the views of the Body Positivity Movement mostly have to do with the visual, namely changing beauty standards and changing people's perception of marginalized bodies. Twitter, on the other hand, is a mostly text-based

platform, its main characteristic being the limitation it places on the character amount of each message. This makes the platform a suited contribution to the research material, as it will allow me to also analyze discourse in text. Additionally, Twitter is generally thought of as the online platform for political discussion, which makes it relevant for this study as it looks at a socio-political movement. I chose YouTube as the third platform of inquiry, for its potential to not only disclose discourses in visual aspects, but also in speech. Additionally, the platform is of interest as vlogging has recently gained in popularity and notoriety, making it an interesting addition to the selected research material.

Lastly, I will look at blogs as a platform for the Body Positivity Movement, as blogs are the social media platform where this online movement originally started (Gibson). I have chosen to analyze the blogs posted by one specific body-positive activist on their blog during this time frame, as it is more difficult to look for blogs through the use of a hashtag, as blogs do not necessarily originate from one underlying platform, but can be independent websites on their own. As of such, I have chosen to analyze the blog of Michelle Elman, a self-proclaimed body-positive activist and certified body confidence coach, who dedicates her life to this cause. Additionally, Elman's blog makes for an interesting topic of research into the Body Positivity Movement, as she herself exists on an intersection of various levels of body normativity, as she is plus-sized woman of color, whose body is visibly marked by scars, reminiscences of a childhood surgery. Because of this, her blog will provide a variety of perspectives into body-positivity.

By looking at the movement's activity over a demarcated period of time and collecting the messages posted on that specific time frame, I will be to analyze a dissection of the movement's activity, and use it as a sample of the movement's online activism. Because the messages are posted on social media, I will have open access to the material, with the exemption of private accounts which will therefore be excluded from my research. Additionally, I will log out of my own accounts to make sure material is not based on my own preferences through algorithms.

5. Analysis

The previous chapters address the possibilities and limitations online media hold for online activism, and how self-expression and -representation on social media can be used as a tool for online activism. However, the usage of new media, and social media in particular, is not autonomous, as the platform itself and its conventions influence what kind of messages are to be posted. The platform's infrastructure, interface and social conventions on how it is to be used determine how the user conceives the possibilities of using the platform. The following analysis will assess this relation between these probabilities of these social media platforms and the self-representation of the Body Positivity Movement on these platforms. Most importantly, the platforms themselves seem to carry out discourses that are contrary to the movement's intentions, which poses the question whether social media can even be used as appropriate platforms for such a movement, and, more importantly, whether the social media platforms affect or produce the movement's discourses?

This analysis is emerges from the misconception of digital media as being value-neutral platforms, and aims to assess how the platforms themselves come into play in the production of subjectivities and discourses. What follows is a two-part analysis. Firstly, I will assess what discourses the Body Positivity Movement conveys, through a content analysis of their social media posts with the use of Critical Discourse Analysis and Semiology. Secondly, I will assess the probabilities of the social media platforms used by the movement, and their part in the production of discourses conveyed in the movement's social media posts through the use of Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis.

5.1 Content Analysis

5.1.1 Fighting for Acceptance

The Body Positivity Movement aims to subvert notions of body normativity, by providing new representations that debunk bodily norms, beauty ideals and negative stereotypes on marginalized bodies. The first discourse that becomes apparent in the social media posts by the movement is that you are not obligated to adhere to bodily norms and beauty ideals. In their social media posts, a great amount of body-positive feminists aim at disproving the notion that you have to adhere to bodily norms and beauty ideals, debunking the obligatory notion of body normativity. This discourse centers on the idea that bodily norms and beauty standards are imposed upon subjects and

one is obligated to adhere to these norms, which are only upheld through social consensus and Foucauldian sense of discipline. The Body Positivity Movement then frees themselves from this panoptic gaze of others, as they openly claim no longer to pursue the ideal. Furthermore, through their social media posts they aim to inspire and persuade others with marginalized bodies to do the same.

The Body Positivity Movement firstly argues that bodies should not have to change or pursue an ideal, arguing that all bodies should be accepted the way they are and that ideal is just a social construct (@Bodypositivememes; @Theodonova; Elman “American Plus Size Haul”). A post by Instagram user Bodypositivememes exemplifies this, as they post an edited photo of a meme, of which the original photo shamed men and women for either being to light weighted or to heavy, and praising those with the 'correct' weight (@Bodypositivememes). The user discredits the meme by labeling all different bodies as normal (@Bodypositivememes). Another example comes from various Twitter users, who argue that the concept of a 'summer body' is redundant, as every body is a summer body, and that no body has to undergo a transformation (@Mylittlepeony; @Katebeth13; @Selina_marie_01). The notion of a transformation, a physical change in order to pursue the ideal body, is problematized by Elman in one of her blogs as well. In this blog post, Elman partakes in the social media trend #2012vs2018, where social media users compare pictures of themselves now and six years back, to show how they have glown up[1]. Elman criticizes the trend for creating a normative binary, that not only causes people to shame a past version of themselves, but is unoriginal and repetitive as well (Elman “Flashback to 2012 Me”). As opposed to focusing on how she has changed on the outside, Elman instead makes a list of what she knew back then and has learned since then, which shows a growth of the mind as opposed to a 'glow up' (Elman “Flashback to 2012 Me”).

Elman's blog exemplifies how the movement advocates for a different relationship to their bodies, substituting self-critique with self-acceptance. These body-positive social media users have come to love the aspects of their bodies that society labels as flaws, such as body hair, cellulite, and all kinds of humps and bumps (@Sarlovesstyle; @El_Reinders; @Bodyposipanda_; @Artbitch666). Furthermore, they argue to be kinder to your body and need to learn to love your body for the way it is (@Paige_radley; @Jessicamaitri). The Instagram post of Hollybentley_yoga illustrates this, as she stresses the importance of mothers teaching their daughters to love their bodies with all of its flaws, as it makes them unique and is part of their identity, and to not listen to critique (@Hollybentley_yoga). The photo of the post depicts her holding her baby in her arms, presenting a nice symbolism of the nurturing relationship between mother and daughter, and the self and the body (@Hollybently_yoga).

[1] A social media term for becoming more attractive once you grow up

Furthermore, the Body Positivity Movement argues that your body and what is understood as bodily flaws, are natural, and therefore you should not have to change it. YouTubers That boy anies 2 and Peterisms explain in their vlog their frustration with society's fear of getting older. As That boy anies 2 states “Why is it so despicable for a woman to age? Why do we praise people who look younger than they actually are?” (That boy anies 2 02:13). She expresses her frustration with this ageism, as aging is a normal, natural process, and placing youth as the ideal is problematic, as it is a biologically impossible goal to strive towards (That boy anies 2 01:25, 03:37). Peterisms expresses a similar point of view, explaining from a personal account how he has dealt with insecurities of his hair turning gray, and how he used hair dye to hide this (Peterisms 01:55). He goes on to explain how he is now learning to accept his 'flaws' and is planning on “aging authentically” (Peterisms 04:25). Lastly, he argues that instead of plastic surgery or dieting to try to change our bodies, we should first work on the issues with ourselves (Peterisms 05:13). His argument is exemplary of the movement's stance on bodily insecurities, arguing that these insecurities are not a problem of the body itself, but of society and internalized social pressure.

The movement addresses diet culture and the influence of media, and criticizes them for this social pressure of beauty ideals. Both Twitter users Iwishiweremetwt and Madmadamd argue that dieting is unnecessary and harmful, and that instead, people should accept and love their fat bodies as they are (@Iwishiweremetwt; @Madmadamd). Twitter users Smiscka and Doctorkirsty call out two magazines for their hypocrisy for promoting body positivity and confidence, while at the same time only focusing on the body's appearance, and even promoting plastic surgery (@Smiscka; @Doctorkirsty). Through this discourse, the movement disproves the assumption that if you do not already adhere to the bodily ideal, you have to strive towards it, and in doing so, attempt to change or transform your body. Instead, the movement indicates that the body does not have to adjust, as the problem does not lie with the body itself, but with society's normative view on bodies.

Furthermore, the movement rejects the notion of body norms, as it creates a hierarchy of value, and is used as an excuse to harass and humiliate non-normative bodies. Members of the Body Positivity movement exclaim that nobody should be a victim of shaming for what their bodies look like, and that they have the right to live their lives without the pressure of social stigma and oppression (@Tinamcguff; @Fattitudemovie). The movement strongly argues that everybody and every body is deserving of a respectful and humane treatment, regardless of they way they look. They therefore reject any notion of body normativity, as it creates a binary of normal bodies that are deserving of respectful treatment, in opposition with non-normative bodies that are shamed and bullied for failing to adhere to the norm.

These posts reveal the dangerous nature of body normativity, as the oppressive character of

beauty ideals and bodily norms can lead to mental health issues. The Body Positivity Movement makes itself available as an online space for people suffering from mental health issues to express themselves. YouTuber Rhiam HY produces a vlog-style series called Mental Health Monday on her channel, where she answers mental health related questions from her viewers. One of her viewers asks for advice on her negative body image and her depression that results from that (Rhian HY 03:20). In addition, she created a forum where her viewers can share their issues and comfort each other (Rhiam HY 01:00). More significantly, the movement addresses mental health issues such as eating disorders and body dismorphic disorder, as they are a result of social pressure of bodily norms and beauty standards. This topic is significantly more prominent on Twitter compared to the other social media platforms assessed in this thesis. The tweets describe people's recovery from an eating disorder, their unhealthy relationship with their bodies, or give advice on such topics. Twitter user Burstsofautumn describes the negative emotions she feels as a consequence of her body dismorphia, but also shows a sign of hope in her willingness to overcome her illness (@Burstsofautumn). Twitter user Morganea_ tweets how her recovery from an eating disorder is a story of “growing up and learning to love myself” (@Morganea_). This overcoming of mental health issues is a recurrent theme in these tweets and describes bodily-acceptance as a journey or process that takes time. YouTuber Peterisms makes a similar statement in his vlog on body positivity. He explains how, instead of trying to change our bodies through surgery or dieting, we should first work on the issues with ourselves (Peterisms 05:13). He reminds himself on a daily basis: “Peter, you are doing the best that you can and one day you'll get there” (Peterisms 13:21). With 'there' he refers to a time and place where he is content with his body, regardless of the way he looks (Peterisms 09:30). These posts illustrate how the Body Positivity Movement as an online space opens itself up for more than just issues of body image and representation, and makes itself available for conversations on mental health issues as well, as the two are often intricately related.

5.1.2 Showing off Non-Normative Bodies

Another discourse apparent in the social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement's, is the argument that non-normative bodies have the right to be shown. One common discourse of body normativity is that non-normative bodies, especially fat bodies and female bodies, are not allowed to dress in clothes that show their body, but should rather be “hidden.” The posts by the Body Positivity Movement aim at disproving the notion that you have to hide your body if you do not adhere to bodily norms. YouTuber Abby Pollock questions this notion, asking her critics: “Is it only okay to show my body when I look like you? Is it only okay to show my body when it fits your mold for what's inspiring?”(Abby Pollock 10:20). Although most of these posts relate to size, other aspects of body normativity are brought up as well, such as cellulite (@Meagenharriman;

@Nienkke). These posts formulate a counter-discourse to the oppressive notion that not all bodies are equal, and those that are inferior are not allowed to be exposed in public eye. The movement argues that people of all shapes and sizes are allowed to show their body, and should not have to hide.

These posts mostly relate this argument to clothing, and show the phrases “show your body” or “show off your body” as a dominant theme. YouTuber Sparkles and Stretchmarks explains how she feels like she is not allowed to wear certain clothes, and how she used clothes to hide herself: I'm very used to using clothes to hide behind. As a fat person I followed all the rules of how I large person is supposed to dress. […] I wanted my clothes to hide me, I wanted them to make me less visible. […] I'm going against all of that this year, and I'm buying things that I like” (Sparkles and Stretchmarks 03:15). Instagram user Katrina.kubo condemns the same oppressive notion in relation to the 'bikini body,' arguing that you do not have to be thin to be able to wear a bikini, while she poses in a feminine posture in a bikini (see fig. 1) (@Katrina.kubo).

Fig. 1: Katrina.kubo's selfie of her in a bikini

The movement argues in favor of a more inclusive understanding of conventions on bodies and clothing, and to do away with hierarchal notions on what bodies are and are not allowed to expose themselves. And as Katrina.kubo's post exemplifies, this is often brought in relation to bikinis. When fashion brand ASOS came out with a new campaign featuring a black, plussize model in one of their bikinis, Twitter users praised the campaign for its move towards more inclusivity and difference in the representation of bodies in media (@Constructivevox; @Sittonbeth_). This

demand for more inclusivity in fashion brands is also apparent in Elman's blog post, where she criticizes how some fashion brands hide away their plus size clothing line: “It’s sad that they make it so hard to find their OWN beautiful clothes. It’s sad that they won’t put their plus clothes AND plus women on their site to be represented” (Elman “American Plus Size Haul”). With this she not only expresses her frustration in shopping for clothes her size, but also her disappointment in the brands' attitude towards fat women.

Through these posts, the Body Positivity Movement conveys the discourse that non-normative bodies have the right to be shown. It appears most prominently on Instagram, as this platform focuses on visual representation it is well suited for exposing non-normative bodies in this manner. This discourse coincides with the perspectives of Olszanowski and Rettberg, who explain how certain bodies are conditioned to not expose themselves or are even obscured from the public eye. Rettberg argues that women who use social media for self-representation are mocked and are subject to hatred, as their self-exposure is in conflict with notions of femininity (18). Women are taught to hide, make themselves smaller and be discreet, and their use of social media is then often pathologized as being narcissistic as a disciplinary measure to put women back in their subordinate place (Rettberg 17-18). The fact that their bodies are non-normative makes this act even more significant, as those who deviate from the bodily norm are told to hide their bodies, and even more so, as the platform they expose themselves bases their policies on the same oppressive notions. Olszanowski argues that Instagram maintains a policy of exclusion as it dictates that certain (female) body parts are not to be shown on its platform, which includes a moral inclination of what bodies are allowed to present themselves and in what manner (Olszanowski 2014, 86). By posting pictures of themselves in bikinis or lingerie, the Body Positivity movement breaks with the repressive policies of the social media platform, and in doing so, denounces oppressing notions of body normativity and representation.

5.1.3 Debunking Stereotypes

In subverting dominant discourses on body normativity, the Body Positivity Movement aims to debunk the negative stereotypes on non-normative bodies through their social media posts. Such stereotypes not only induce prejudiced conceptions of people with marginalized bodies, but often lead to a dehumanization of those people as well (Gurrieri 199). The posts by the Body Positivity Movement portray fat bodies in activities that are often not thought of in relation to their body type, to contradict and disprove the negative stereotypes of fat people. The Instagram post by Heads_together illustrates this. This post features a picture of two fat women who just completed a marathon, accompanied by the text “This is what a marathon runner looks like” (see fig. 2) (@Heads_together). With this post, the Instagram user firstly debunks the negative stereotype of fat

people as lazy or having an unhealthy lifestyle, as it proves that fat women can be active, driven and athletic too. In addition to this, it also addresses the stereotypical image of what an athlete looks like, revealing that fit does not necessarily equals thin.

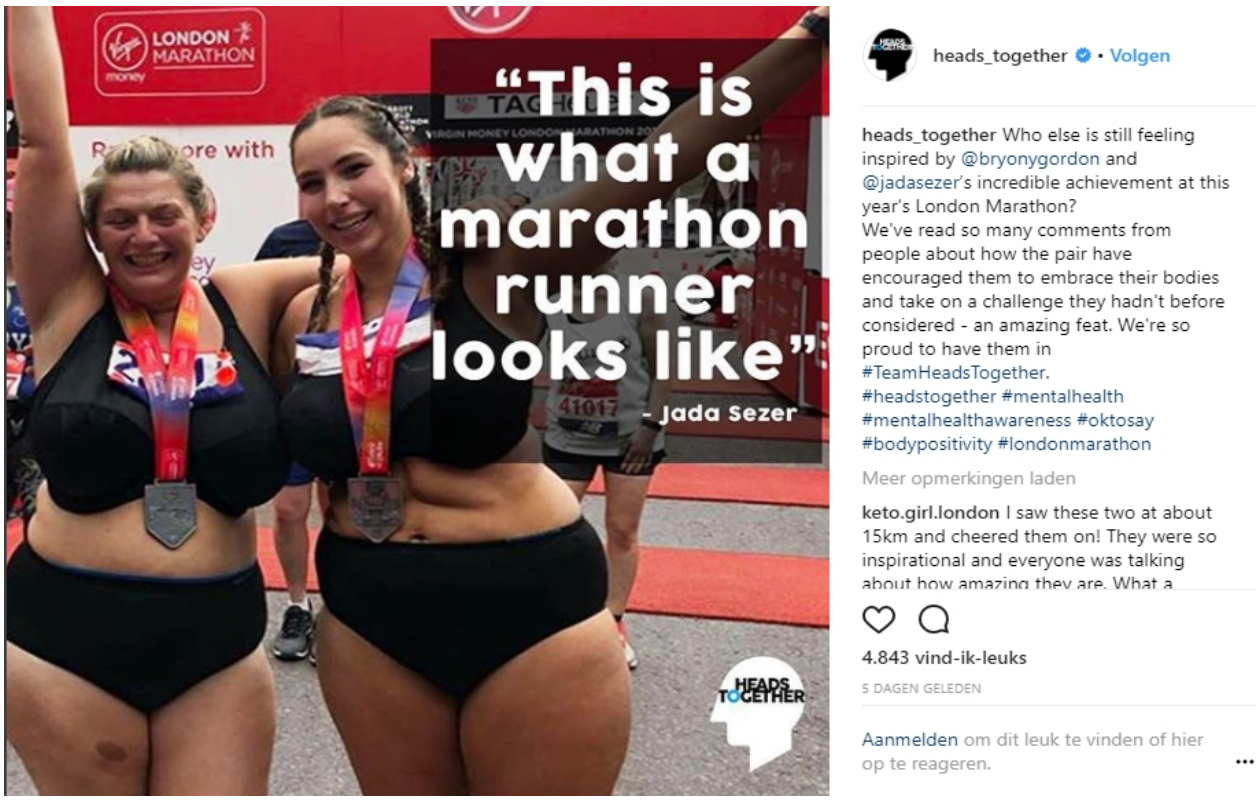

Fig. 2: Heads_together's post debunks the stereotype of fat as lazy

Instagram user Fullcreamfigure's post shares a similar message. The photo depicts a fat woman in lingerie doing the splits while holding two swords (@Fullcreamfigure). The caption reads: “Your body can do anything you put your mind to. Don't let society limit you because of your size. Your size has nothing to do with your abilities” (@Fullcreamfigure). By sharing a photo depicting a fat woman as fit, flexible and active, this post too debunks the conception of fat people as lazy and inactive. Instead, it spreads the message that capabilities of your body do not have to adhere to society's conception of your body. In addition to debunking stereotypes on fatness, the movement addresses stereotypes on other marginalized identities as well. In her video on her identity as an Asian-American, YouTuber Neotenousmenace states that she does not relate to the stereotypes that exist on Asians, such as academic success and drive (Neotenousmenace 05:55). Further more, she argues that many Asian-American women might feel restricted by such cultural notions as it places expectations upon them to be a certain way (Neotenousmenace 03:50).

In creating new representations on social media to debunk negative stereotypes and the

general conceptions their bodies, these posts by the Body Positivity Movement exemplify how self-representation on online platforms can be used to carry out a certain image of one's identity and change people's perspectives.

5.1.4 The Beauty of Non-Normativity

By disproving the negative stereotypes that exist on people who do not fit the bodily norms, debunking the notion that non-normative bodies have to hide themselves, and rejecting the obligatory attribute of bodily norms, the Body Positivity movement provides three counter-discourses to body normativity. These three discourses conveyed in the social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement mostly focus on invalidating the notion of body normativity, as it implements a hierarchy on bodies, and how different bodies should be looked upon and treated differently. By subverting discourses in service of body normativity, the movement aims to create more equality in the conception of marginalized bodies.

However, other social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement convey a slightly different objective. As opposed to refuting body normativity as a whole, these posts aim to broaden the definition of bodily norms and beauty ideals to include marginalized bodies as well. One of these discourses conveyed in the social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement is that non-normative bodies are beautiful too. These posts aim to disprove the exclusive notion of the beauty standard by representing marginalized bodies in a flattering manner, and arguing that beauty is a more diverse concept that differs for each person. The Instagram picture of Brasbys illustrates this, as it shows a picture of several women of all shapes, sizes and colors posing in their underwear, with the word 'beautiful' written on their legs (see fig. 3) (@Brasbys). A tweet by twitter user Evelynsdreams is of similar content, as it shows an illustration of different breasts shapes on women of various skin colors, accompanied by the text “all breasts are beautiful” (@Evelynsdreams).

Many posts conveying this discourse are of fat people sharing selfies, exclaiming that they feel beautiful, so they are beautiful (@Rayneon; @Joeydarlinn; @Hottiecodone). Their selfies relate to Goffman's theory on the presentation of the self, by performing an image of the self they are able to influence their observer's interpretation thereof. In this case, by presenting themselves as beautiful, by performing their self-image as beautiful, they wish to communicate this to their observers. Because of this, the selfie allows the Body Positivity Movement to not only regain more control over how they are represented, but how they are gazed upon as well.

Fig. 3: Brasbys' post shows a more inclusive notion of beauty

Furthermore, this discourse argues that an agreeable appearance is of key in body-acceptance and body-confidence. In her YouTube video offering advice on body confidence, Megan Renee advices her viewers to take care of their appearance, because it is beneficial to a positive mind set and helps to feel better about oneself (Renee 07:20). Her argument seems rather contradictory, as she argues in favor of body confidence, but also states that this can be achieved by adhering to beauty norms. The problem with arguments like this, is that the acceptance of non-normative bodies is still sought in the normalizing gaze of others. A tweet from Twitter user Ncf_brum exemplifies this as well. In their tweet, they share an illustration which argues that different body types are all beautiful as beauty is a subjective preference, and that your preference should not be an excuse to body shame those who do not meet your preference (@Ncf_brum). The tweet is accompanied by the hashtag #antibullying, which indicates that the tweet is foremost directed at rejecting the malign treatment of those who do not meet the beauty standard of others. However, this also connotes that body-acceptance still lies in the approval of others, as what may not be beautiful to one person, can still be beautiful to another.

In seeking the approval of others and presenting themselves in a flattering manner, these social media posts connote that body-acceptance and their worthiness still depends on the notion of beauty and the approval of others. Furthermore, in trying to persuade their observers that they are beautiful too, the social media users often reiterate tropes on femininity and feminine gestures to convey a conception of beauty of their non-normative bodies.

Goffman distinguishes several tropes and characteristics of portraying femininity in advertisements, those being looking off camera or looking seductively into the camera, assuming an imbalanced posture, and gently touching the body or an object (Goffman 1979, 29, 46, 68). These tropes are recognizable in the selfies taken by the Body Positivity Movement as well (see fig. 2 and 4) (@Sophieeturner; @SonsOfTheGods1; @Glamhergirl; @Thecurvyrebel; @Mara.belle; @Katrina.kubo). Figures 2 and 4 exemplify such selfies by the Body Positivity Movement. Katrina.kubo's selfie shows her leaning on one leg, with her head tilted, creating an off-balance pose, while her hands are gently caressing her body (see fig. 2). In her selfie shared on Twitter[2], SonsOfTheGods1 takes on a feminine pose as well, tilting her head, gently holding on to the door frame, and glancing downward (see fig. 4). Additionally, as these two selfies exemplify as well, the women often pose in very feminine apparel, such as bikinis, lingerie or dresses, emphasizing their body and their femininity (@Katrina.kubo; @SonsOfTheGods1; @Hottiecodonerayneon; @Sophieeturner; @Glamhergirl; @Bodyposipanda_).

Fig. 4: SonsOfTheGods1's selfie shared on Twitter shows off her curves

[2] Even though Twitter is a mostly text-based social media platform, the tweets conveying this discourse often include pictures, many of which are selfies.

Activists of the movement perform femininity as a means to dispute the normative claims that exclude them from notions of beauty. YouTuber Sarah Foord explains in her video that adapting a pin-up style, a clothing style that is highly feminine and accentuates feminine curves, helped her to gain body-confidence as a disabled person (Foord 00:04). Another post that illustrates this performance of femininity of from Instagram user Masterselflove, in which she shows her original take on the #transformationtuesday trend, where instead of losing weight, she shows how she gained weight and became happier because of it (@Masterselflove). The caption explains that gaining weight enabled her to fulfill her dreams of becoming a model (@Masterselflove).

By taking on these feminine tropes and characteristics, these body-positive social media users perform femininity in order to argue that their non-normative bodies, their fat bodies, can be beautiful too, as they can still meet other demands of the beauty ideal. However, this contradicts the Body Positivity Movement's main objective to subvert body normativity. In arguing that non-normative bodies can be beautiful too, the movement seems to advocate for a broadening of conceptions of beauty to be more inclusive, as opposed to rejecting such conceptions all together.

More importantly, to bring about this shift in beauty conceptions, the body-positive activists take on feminine poses and gestures, and doing so, they still support other problematic discourses. By questioning beauty ideals, they question the heteronormative notion that one needs to be attractive in order to find a partner. But in performing femininity, they maintain the patriarchal and heteronormative notion of female sexuality and subject themselves to the male gaze. In their attempt to subvert one problematic discourse, they reiterate another.

5.1.5 Consumption for Confidence

The last discourse conveyed in the posts by the Body Positivity Movement supports the notion of the ideal neoliberal subject. Firstly, by promoting the idea that body-confidence and body-acceptance can be achieved through the consumption of the right commodities. One way fat people feel excluded from the norm is that there are less shops and brands they can buy clothes from, especially clothes that are on trend and hip. A great amount of the analyzed posts address this topic, in which the users share images of their clothes and outfits to their followers to inspire others and support plussize inclusive shops. Pausé even notes that access to fashionable clothing is to her one of the great appeals of the Internet (Pausé). On Instagram, these posts portray selfies of fat people showing off clothes that they like, or how the item of clothing fits and shows off their body (@Fanny_enjoying_life; @Mara.belle; @Katrina.kubo; @Rayneon; @Zlota_fishka; @Joeydarlinn). Other posts on YouTube and a blog post by Elman contain clothing hauls[3] in which

[3] A blog or vlog where the user shows off recent commodities they have purchased

they actively promote the shops and brands they got their clothes from, to help their followers in their quest for pretty, plussize clothing (Sometimes Glam; Sparkles and Stretchmarks; Elman "American Plus Size Haul"). The body-positive social media users often tag the brands in their posts to promote them, but some even go as far as to promote discount codes[4] (@Lividlipids; @Sophieeturner). The body-positive activists then promote fashionable clothing in their social media posts, to show that these products are accessible for people like them too, inspire each other to dress more daring, and provide new representations of marginalized bodies in stylish clothing. However, this creates the notion that body-confidence and -acceptance of non-normative bodies can be achieved through the consumption of the right commodities. This coincides with the notion of the ideal neoliberal subject, where you have to actively shape yourself through consumption to be the best version of yourself.

In their analysis of the Body Positivity Movement, Gibson and Sastre conclude that the movement has moved away from their original, radical objective (Gibson; Sastre 941). This analysis shows a similar result. By pleading for an inclusion of marginalized bodies in body norms and beauty ideals, and advocating in favor of consuming products, the movement is complicit in the conservation of oppressive structures such as heteronormativity and neoliberalism. It seems contradictory to argue that a fat body is worthy of equal treatment to a thin body, because it can adhere to feminine beauty ideals too. In this manner, oppressive notions of femininity and beauty ideals still stand, and more importantly, create an illusion of inclusivity while other marginalized bodies that do not comply remain excluded.

The Body Positivity Movement's main objective is to stand up for people with marginalized bodies, repel the humiliation and harassment they endure, and to provide new forms of representation. However, as this analysis demonstrates, the execution of this main objective is rather questionable. The first three discourses outlined above convey a desire to break free from body normativity, whereas the latter two convey an endeavor to broaden the understanding of body norms. As Gibson's research points out, this can partially be explained because of the movement's lack of central organizational structure in favor of a networked structure: because the movement is organized around a hashtag, various social media accounts can contribute to the movement, but each have their own interpretation and motivation as to what body positivity is to them. In addition to this, the probabilities of the social media platforms utilized by the movement affect the production of discourses, which both benefits and contradicts the movement's objective.

[4] Social media influencers are often paid royalties in the promotion of products or brands. When their discount code is used, they receive a cut of the profit.

5.2 Analysis of Probabilities

The second part of this analysis will address the probabilities of the social media platforms Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and blogs utilized by the Body Positivity Movement. Through the use of Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis, the role of the platforms in the production of (counter) discourses will be assessed. The social network sites are not neutral in cultural production on these platforms, as Brock's research into #BlackTwitter exemplifies. This raises several questions on the Body Positivity Movement as a form of online activism in relation to the social media platforms and the production of discourse: What discourses are produced through the use of these platforms? Do these agree or interfere with the Body Positivity Movement's objective? Do these probabilities produce or affect the production of the discourses conveyed in the movement's social media posts outlined above? In order to answer these questions, first each platform and its probabilities will be addressed separately. Secondly, other general trends which were observed throughout several platforms will be assessed. And Finally, to come to a conclusion, these outcomes will be related to the results of the content analysis, to determine to what extent the probabilities produce the discourses conveyed by the Body Positivity Movement.

5.2.1 Probabilities of Twitter

The Body Positivity Movement's use of Twitter as a platform distinguishes itself from the other platforms in a variety of ways, because of its affordances and conventions. Most of this comes down to the fact that Twitter is a mostly text-based social network site. Even though the platform provides the option to share photos, videos, gifs and even polls, what separates the platform from other social network sites, is its emphasis on text by placing a limit on the amount of characters used per post. The limit of 280 characters per post (recently increased from the traditional 140 characters per post) forces users to concretely formulate their post, but also encourages the impulsive sharing of thoughts, as the act of posting requires little effort. Brock notes that Twitter users were able to adopt the use of the platform easily into their daily communication habits, as Twitter's minimalism enabled the platform to be accessible on mobile devices from an early stage on (2012, 536). The platform's minimalism in combination with the portability of smartphones produces a convenient platform for instant and impulsive thoughts sharing and self-expression. Additionally, the platform enables users to respond to each other's post directly, as opposed to placing the replies in a separate section, mimicking the structure of a direct conversation. Starting discussions on Instagram, YouTube or a blog is far less direct, as the responses are placed in a separate section, creating a more indirect response to the post, as opposed to having a direct conversation. Lastly, the platform allows its users to easily share other people's posts, but also

articles, videos and content from other web pages, more so than the other platforms assessed here. These three characteristics make it so that the platform is more accessible for starting conversations and participating in discussions with others. Manovich makes a similar remark, as he characterizes Twitter as the social media platform for news and links exchange because of its features of immediacy and sharing (41).

It comes as no surprise then, starting and partaking in socio-political discussions is what characterizes the Body Positivity Movement's activity on this platform. These posts aim at dissecting the root of the problem, as most tweets focus on dismantling the idea that you have to adhere to a certain body ideal, disproving the notion of body normativity itself.[5] Most of the movement's posts on twitter share thoughts and opinions, followed by sharing articles or videos. Through their tweets, the Body Positivity Movement wants to start a conversation or discussion on the norms society places on others' bodies, and provide concrete arguments to disprove this notion. The use of hashtags not only allows them to form a community of like-minded peers, but to respond to other events and trends as well, enabling them to branch out of their bubble to converse with others and spread their message, making full use of the platform's networkability. The movement's use of Twitter as a platform distinguishes itself from the other platforms, as Twitter's probabilities incite the movement to use this platform for discussion on disproving body normativity through direct arguments, as the platform's probabilities and conventions allow for direct political discussion, more so than the other platforms.

5.2.2 Probabilities of Instagram

When compared to Instagram, it is far less likely to start a conversation than on Twitter, as the main feature of the post is the image. Even though the caption of the image can still provide meaningful thoughts and arguments, the post has to be accompanied by a picture which becomes the main focus of the post. In rare cases, Instagram users even post a screen shot of a post from Twitter or Tumblr in order to share their thoughts through text on Instagram. However, this is a quite uncommon practice on Instagram, so much so that it breaks with the platform's conventions and aesthetics.

The movement's use of Instagram is then characterized by the platform's emphasis on the visual aspect of the post. More specifically, the social network site only allows its users to post to the platform from a mobile phone, creating a specific platform for the immediate sharing of photos on the go. The easy accessibility of the networked camera and social network sites aimed at photo-sharing has democratized the artistic craft of photography (Tifentale and Manovich 2018, 169-170). This is underpinned by Iqani, who argues that mobile phone photography enables users to visually manifest their identities through the mediation of Instagram's aesthetics (175-176). The

[5] The first discourse assessed in the content analysis

democratization of the medium leads to specific conventions on Instagram which shape the way people use the platform, what objects are represented and in what manner (Manovich 26, 52). One of the most popular objects to be represented on Instagram is the self, as the hashtags #me and #selfie are some of the most used hashtags on the platform (Wendt 31). The selfie distinguishes itself from other forms of self-portraiture because of its immediate distribution through social media (Tifentale 10-11). The networked camera is therefore an essential component of the origin of the selfie, as it enables users to take and share pictures instantly, along with its metadata as hashtags, geotags, likes and comments (Tifentale and Manovich 2014, 8). The technological features of the smartphone and the conventional use of Instagram as a platform lead to the popularization of the selfie, a photo made for sharing (Tifentale and Manovich 2014, 8). Yet, the act is individual as well, as it enables the user to express their identity to the public (Tifentale and Manovich 2014, 8). This is underpinned by Iqani, who argues that selfies are all similar in content and style, yet individualistic at the same time. Although these probabilities of the platform persuade Instagram users to post selfies, the content of the selfie can still be authentic and personal.

As the platform places emphasis on the visual aspect of the post, so do the members of the Body Positivity Movement when using this platform. The movement's posts on Instagram mostly address how notions of body normativity and the beauty standard are too exclusive, and advocate for the inclusion of marginalized bodies by claiming the space and attributes that were previously denied them. The selfie is a social media phenomenon mostly related to Instagram, as the platform allows for immediate posting of content in which the focus lies on the photo of the post, enabling its users to represent themselves visually. The movement plays into the trend of the selfie, by using it as a means to provide new representations of marginalized bodies and breaking with cultural notions of what does bodies are allowed to do. The movement's use of Instagram, as a visual based medium, can be characterized as more of a “show don't tell” tactic, where the image on its own provides the evidence for the negation of normative and discriminatory notions on marginalized bodies. It is therefore a logical consequences that most discourses addressed on this platform focus on the subversion of discourses that place physical limitations on the appearance of marginalized bodies. This can be recognized in several of the aspects of the content analysis outlined above, such as debunking negative stereotypes, debunking the notion that non-normative bodies have to hide, disproving the notions that non-normative bodies cannot be beautiful or feminine and non-normative bodies should be excluded from fashionable clothing. The movement's use of Instagram as a visual platform is then mostly centered on providing new representations of non-normative bodies, but in dong so, reiterate other oppressing discourses. The discourses conveyed in these posts connote that the body is malleable through consumption, and that body-acceptance and -confidence

can be achieved through the consumption of the right commodities, reiterating discourses on femininity and neoliberalism.

Because of this, the use of the platform by the Body Positivity Movement seems rather problematic. However, Instagram as the visual platform is also the most significant for the movement to situate itself on, as Instagram's policy actively works against the self-representation of marginalized bodies by favoring those who do adhere to bodily norms, and censors those who do not. As Olszanowski states in her analysis of feminist artists on Instagram, the platform marginalizes female users through inconsistent modes of censorship, targeting specifically the representation of owned female sexuality as a means to discipline women (2014, 84). Furthermore, Rettberg argues that social media filter out people from the main feed when they do not adhere to or pursue the image of an ideal neoliberal subject who dedicates themselves to their appearance and self-improvement (23). These conventions work as a filter through which users represent themselves, shape themselves as subjects and filter out those that deviate from the norm (Rettberg 23). This includes the members of the Body Positivity Movement as well, not only for their expression of their unconventional femininity and attractiveness, but most importantly, as non-normative bodies represent a deviance to the ideal, and are therefore not allowed to expose themselves and instead are taught to hide. Presenting their bodies on this platform then becomes a significant form of resistance, as they shape their subjectivity in opposition of these discriminatory regulations by claiming the space that is normally denied to them.

5.2.3 Probabilities of Vlogs and Blogs

Where the Body Positivity Movement utilizes Twitter as a platform for socio-political discussions on body normativity and Instagram as a platform for providing norm-breaking representations, the movement's use of YouTube and blogs seems to be somewhere in the middle of this. YouTube as a video-sharing website is an audio-visual based platform. The visual aspect allows the members of the movement to provide new representations, while simultaneously go deeper into socio-political discourse through dialogue. Blogs demonstrate a similar duality of content, as this platform is mostly text-based, but allows for pictures and videos to be incorporated into the post as well. The posts shared on these platforms vary from more light-hearted content as clothing hauls, to journal entries, to opinion pieces, sometimes even within the same post. YouTuber Sparkles and Stretchmarks exemplifies this in her, vlog, when she firstly addresses the social pressure of hiding her fatness in clothing and how changing her body to fit the norm would not necessarily make her happier (02:19, 03:15). She then states that she is from further on going to contest these norms placed on her body by dressing more daringly, and continues her vlog with a clothing haul (Sparkles and Stretchmarks 04:04).

Furthermore, the YouTube videos of Sparkles and Stretchmarks illustrates how the Body Positivity Movement plays into the conventions of user-generated content on the video-sharing platform. In her essay on the future of short-form content, Faye Woods distinguishes several key characteristics of YouTube culture and conventions. She ascribes the emergence of short-form content to networked mobile technology like the smartphone (Woods 231). The smartphone enables viewers to watch content on the go, but limits the content to simplicity due to the limited screen size. She states that vlogging is one of the three most popular genres of content on YouTube (Woods 238). Vlogs are characterized as built around a sense of intimacy, as the vlogger looks directly into the camera, as if they are directly addressing the viewer (Woods 238). Secondly, vlogs are of intimate nature as the content is based on monologues of a personal account or experience (Woods 238). Lastly, the recording of the video is often set in an intimate space, such as the vlogger's bed room, inviting the viewer into their personal space (Woods 238). This gives the viewer a sense of personal interaction, as if they are having a conversation with the vlogger, even though the video is prerecorded and conversation is being held from one side. More importantly, the intimacy of the video which creates a conception of the vlogger as an ordinary person, which adds to the feeling of authenticity.

The vlogs posted by the Body Positivity Movement check all of these characteristics, as they provide short-form content in the form of vlogs. In these vlogs, they directly address the camera, often in a home setting as the living room or bed room, explaining their personal opinion or speaking from personal experience. This style of content production creates a sense of authenticity and ordinariness that aids their cause, as it diminishes the presumed distance between vlogger and viewer, because of which their message will get across better.

Furthermore, the vlogs and blogs are characterized by a sense of personal authenticity, as they mimic the tradition of a personal journal. Both vlogs and blogs often abide a ritualistic upload schedule, where the creator has set days on which they post to the platform, similar to the routine of writing daily or weekly journal entries. Additionally, the vlogs often center on personal experiences and are often set in a personal setting, similar to how a journal functions as a private space to archive personal accounts. Where they differ is that a personal journal or diary is kept privately, whereas these vlogs and blogs are published online in a virtual public space with the intention of becoming the object of the gaze of others. This coincides with Sastre's argument of personal exposure being a neoliberal construct, where young women need to publicly display their private self and authentic voice (936). Publishing a private journal online or sharing your private physical space to the public is an extreme form of continuation of this self-exposure of the private self that goes beyond that of the selfie, as it touches upon the most intimate spheres of a person. The Body

Positivity Movement's performance of intimacy in their vlogs and blogs on one hand helps their cause as it claims authenticity, which adds to the credibility of their expressions and helps get their point across. On the other hand, it plays into the rhetoric of neoliberal citizenship, through which the movement reiterates oppressing power structures.

5.2.4 Social Media Trends and Challenges

Lastly, a theme that becomes apparent in the analysis of social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement, is their inclination to participate in online trends, such as challenges, trending topics and common popular hashtags. These trends have become a convention of the social media platforms as they have obtained a common presence on the social network sites, as the ice bucket challenge, the planking challenge and the out fit of the day hashtag exemplify. In partaking in such trends and challenges, the movement is able to reach out beyond their own community and spread their message to the mainstream, taking advantage of the networkability of new media. This theme is mostly common on Twitter, where the movement participates in hashtag conversations as #tuesdaythoughts (@Gemmatvcasting), #wednesdaywisdom (@Jessicamaitri), and #thursdaythought (@Carlajones1979), in which users share their opinions and provide counsel on various topics. An additional hashtag trend the movement participates in is #ootd (@Makeupluvah2017), where users post selfies to their feed to show off their outfit of that day. In case of YouTube, the movement joins in on the trend of (clothing) hauls and the 'what is in my bag?' challenge, a challenge where YouTubers reveal what products they carry with them on a daily basis (Sometimes Glam; Sparkles and Stretchmarks; Elman “What's in My Bag?”). Finally, the movement participates in transformation-based trends as #transformationtuesday on Instagram (@Masterselflove) and #2012vs2018 (Elman “Flashback to 2012 Me”) on Elman's blog. Both these trends focus on displaying a transformation of one's appearance over a period of time.

Most of the trends mentioned here are hashtag based, and exemplify the various functions of the hashtag as distinguished by Olszanowski. The first of which is that the hashtag allows social media users to participate in challenges, which becomes evident in the examples mentioned above. (Olszanowski 2015, 235). Secondly, the hashtags enables the movement for their individual post to become part of a bigger conversation, another function Olszanowski ascribes to the hashtag (2015, 234). Through this function of the hashtag, the movement is able to reach out beyond their own community in a two-fold manner, as not only a user's individual post becomes part of the hashtag-based trend, but the movement's discourse that is conveyed through this post as well. Lastly, Olszanowski states that the hashtag can function as a form of inspiration (2015, 236). This function of the hashtag is relevant here as well, as participating in popular trends and challenges enables the members of the Body Positivity Movement to come up with new and creative ways of spreading

their message and reaching beyond the movement's bubble, by playing into online trends while adding a body-positive flavor.

The Body Positivity Movement's participation in these social media trends is of significance for three reasons. Firstly, as mentioned above, they are able to spin these trends to their own benefit, as they join in on the hashtag or challenge while adding a body-positive message, as is the case with #tuesdaythoughts, #wednesdaywisdom, and #thursdaythought. This illustrates how the movement utilizes the networkability aspect of social media to spread their discourse.

However, in participating in these trends, the movement also becomes susceptible to problematic discourses that are intrinsic to some of these trends tend to consciously or subconsciously reiterate and reinforce suppressive discourses and dominant power structures. The trends of #ootd and hauls focus on clothing, which connote discourses on femininity and consumerism, through which ideologies on heteronormativity, patriarchy and neoliberalism are conveyed. In participating in these trends, the Body Positivity Movement conveys these problematic discourses, which directly contradicts the movement's objective of subverting and rejecting hierarchal notions of normativity.

Yet, the movement is also able to radically transform some of these problematic trends and challenges into something positive, as is the case with the hashtags #2012vs2018 and #transformationtuesday, and the 'what is in my bag?' challenge. In her YouTube video, Elman demonstrates a different take on the 'what is in my bag?' challenge. Normally, this challenge centers on revealing what kind of products the YouTuber relies on on a day to day basis. Elman uses the trend to reveal how the contents of her bag differ radically from others because of her disability, to spread awareness on how living with a disability changes habits of daily life, something able-bodied people may not be aware of (Elman “What's in My Bag?” 04:40). In participating in this trend, she shifts the focus on commodities to spreading awareness.

Other posts by the movement demonstrate a similar shift in discourse as well. Elman's blog post on the #2012vs2018 and Masterselflove's Instagram post on #transformationtuesday demonstrate a different take on the transformation. Both trends originally focus on a transformation process of becoming more attractive over a period of time, often involving weight loss. Both Elman and Masterselflove reverse this process with Elman looking less feminine and Masterselflove gaining weight, moving away from the beauty ideal instead of towards it (Elman “Flashback to 2012 Me”; @Masterselflove).

Instead, they express a transformation of the mind, as they both indicate to have become happier within the years that have gone by (Elman “Flashback to 2012 Me”; @Masterselflove). More importantly, the transformation shown in their posts refute the notion of needing to pursue

beauty ideals or body norms, with which they disprove the rhetoric of neoliberal citizenship of shaping yourself towards the ideal. Their posts demonstrate a rebellion against the normative discourses the trends originally promote, and exemplify how the Body Positivity Movement utilizes social media trends and challenges to creatively spread their message.

5.2.5 The Pitfall of Self-Exposure

The arguments outlined above illustrate how the Body Positivity Movement utilizes social media platforms for their potential of providing new discourses and counter-discourses on marginalized identities, and how their use of these platforms produces dominant oppressing discourses as well. What is not mentioned yet, however, is how the Body Positivity Movement participates in the modern trend of social media use itself and the urge of continuous self-exposure.

In participating in modern trend of social media, the members of the Body Positivity Movement reiterate the neoliberal rhetoric that self-exposure leads to liberation. In their quest for body-acceptance and providing new forms of representation, the members of the movement exhibit themselves before the gaze of others, and in some cases even seek the approval of others. Some YouTubers even display this more directly, in asking their viewers to click the like-button on their video and to subscribe to their channel (Renee; Elman “What's in My Bag?”; That boy anies 2). This is reminiscent of Sastre's analysis of the Body Positivity Movement, in which she states that in their online self-representation, the members of the movement willfully subject themselves to the panoptic gaze, a construct of neoliberal citizenship (932, 936). According to Sastre, the Body Positivity Movement mirrors the new trend to openly exhibit your private self and authentic identity to the public, which plays into the conception of neoliberal citizenship which, as Sastre states, “excludes none from the project of self-enactment and disclosure” (936). Apart from the movement's selfies, this becomes even more evident in their YouTube vlogs and Elman's blog, which mimic the practice of keeping a personal journal, but instead of documenting their personal experiences and locking them up in a nightstand, they are now shared online and on full display.

The Body Positivity Movement opposes notions of bodily normativity, including the notion of continuous self-improvement to strive towards an ideal that substantiates the neoliberal subject (Sastre 932). However, in their use of social media, the movement becomes entangled in the same oppressive structure, as self-exposure and renouncing privacy reiterates practices of the docile body (Sastre 936-937). Their motivation for their online self-exposure is to liberate marginalized bodies, but instead, the boarders of who is allowed to expose are merely extended (Sastre 937). This complies with some of the discourses outlined above, such as 'non-normative bodies have the right to be shown,' and 'non-normative bodies are beautiful or feminine too,' as the movement's members in these posts aim to provide new representations and a counter-narrative to dominant discourses on

marginalized bodies, but in doing so they voluntarily subject themselves before the panoptic gaze which indicates that the quest for body-acceptance still lies in the approval of others.

Hoofd also claims that online activism will become entangled in neoliberal structure or the speed-elitist logic, which is characterized by "a call to make oneself constantly heard and seen – to be vocal, to speak, participate, vote, disagree, decide, and in general to subjectively play out the humanist emancipatory promise" (28, 31). This illustrates how self-representation as form of online activism does not subvert but serves the neoliberal power structure, as the practices of self-exposure and display one's political engagement are practices of the ideal neoliberal subject. Even though the Body Positivity Movement's actions seem authentic and of their own choice, their practices demonstrate how power structures such as neoliberalism are unconsciously internalized and executed.

5.3 Discussion

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement on blogs, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube shows a two-sided outcome. On the one hand, it demonstrates how the movement subverts dominant power structures through their self-representation on these platforms. By providing new forms of representation of marginalized bodies, debunking negative stereotypes, and presenting counter-narratives to oppressing notions on body norms and beauty ideals, the movement is able to subvert and reject dominant, oppressing discourses on body normativity. The discourses these posts convey liberate the marginalized body from normative conceptions, as they renounce the notion of having to hide your deviating body, reject the obligatory nature of body norms, debunk the negative stereotypes, demand humane treatment of all regardless of their appearance, and aim to substitute body normativity with a more diverse understanding of bodies and bodily subjectivity. The Body Positivity Movement utilizes the easy accessibility and networkability features of social network sites to create a supportive community of people with non-normative bodies. Additionally, they use the social network sites as a platform to provide new, positive and creative representations of marginalized bodies, and reject and disprove dominant narratives of their bodies, as they let their voices be heard by exclaiming their own experience and opinions.

In representing themselves online, the members of the Body Positivity Movement they express their deviating identity, and as they own up to it, they are able to convert back power so that their marginalization can no longer be used against them. This makes the simple act of posting a selfie or writing a tweet an act of radical rebellion as they claim a virtual space, as space was previously denied to them. Through their posts, they not only express their own personal accounts, but also form a community, and express themselves as part of that community. This radical self-representation of marginalized bodies is of significance in relation to online activism, as by steering their viewers interpretation of their bodies to the direction they want to, they are able to counteract dominant discourses, and are able to change people's views on marginalized bodies, as through the process of ostension, their individual posts become the new model of reference for the entire community they represent.

However, not all the discourses conveyed by the movement in their social media posts connote the same progressive objective, as some reiterate and reinforce the same problematic discourses the movement wishes to subvert. Some of the posts assessed in this analysis convey that the body is malleable, and that body acceptance and confidence can be constructed through the performance of beauty and femininity, and through the consumption of the right commodities, which connote discourses on heteronormativity, patriarchy and neoliberalism. By reiterating these oppressing discourses, these posts connote that marginalized bodies can be accepted as long as they

still adhere to other norms, upholding standards of normativity and reinforcing existing power structures.

The Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis of the social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement reveal that the platforms' probabilities, the conventions of social media use and their interface and infrastructure produce discourses and affect the discourses conveyed in the social media posts of the Body Positivity Movement. The movement's benefits from Instagram's emphasis on the visual aspect of the post, as it allows them to provide new forms of representations of marginalized bodies that present their narratives on their terms. Yet, these representations are also shaped by the conventions of the platform's use, which reiterates discourses on femininity and commercialism. The technological affordances of Twitter allow for the movement to start socio-political discussions to disprove body normativity. However, this activity is reminiscent of the characteristic of neoliberal citizenship to actively engage in political conversation. Similarly, the cultural conventions on blogs and vlogs as forms of online journals enable the movement to provide personal accounts, speak their opinion and share their experiences on body normativity from a personal point of view, but this proceeding also responds to the rhetoric of self-exposure of neoliberal citizenship. Similar discourses are recognizable in the movement's engagement with social media trends and challenges, where they utilize the platforms' networkability to spread their message and provide counter-discourses, but in some cases also repeat repressive discourses intrinsic to the social media trends. Lastly, the act of self-representation on social media itself is put into question, as it echoes notions of neoliberal citizenship, such as the voluntary self-exposure before the panoptic gaze of others in pursuit of acceptance, and the act of self-exposure as part of the constant process of self-improvement to pursue an ideal state.

This analysis reveals a duality on social media probabilities and the production of discourse: the networkability and accessibility of these social media platforms produce an optimal space for democratic participation and enable marginalized identities to rebel against the normative discourses suppressing them, while social conventions on self-exposure enact and amplify problematic discourses. The Body Positivity Movement's use of these platforms is then characterized by a certain paradox: the movement uses social network sites as platforms to provide counter-discourses through new narratives and representations, but in their use of social media platforms, they reiterate dominant discourses that negates the movement's progressive objective. Morozov addresses the dilemma posed to online activists of choosing between the dependency on tainted platforms, or the invisibility of independent platforms, and concludes that most activist undertakings prefer the former, as it enables them to reach a larger audience (216). In order for the

Body Positivity Movement to make an impact on body norms in society, moving their operation to an independent platform would not be an option, as they will be unable to interact with mainstream conversation.

The answer to the proposed paradox does not lie in a move away from popular social network sites, but rather in a coexistence of the discourses produced by movement's objective and discourses produced by the platform's probabilities. In order for the Body Positivity Movement to continue their usage of the social media platforms, it is of importance to no longer assume the neutrality of the platforms they situate themselves on, and instead attain an awareness of probabilities of social network sites and their influence on the production of discourse. When this is achieved, the movement will be able to engage with the problematic discourses produced by the platforms' probabilities to augment them, impeach them, and negate them. This approach is similar to the way the feminist artists in Olszanowski's research engage in Instagram's inconsistent policy of censorship on female sexuality, where they, rather than succumbing to the imposed rules, engage with them in a playful manner to destabilize its suppressive power (2014, 93). Furthermore, Olszanowski states there lies an “unexpected power in repression” (2014, 93), through which this form of engagement with the suppressive discourses transforms the movement's online activity into an act of rebellion. Out of the posts assessed in this analysis, Elman's and Masterselflove's creative and transformative engagement in social media trends illustrate this the most, as they are able to convert the repressive discourses conveyed in the social media trends into a body-positive exclamation. Both Gibson and Sastre conclude in their analysis of the Body Positivity Movement that the movement needs to pursue a more radical trajectory in order to liberate marginalized bodies form the imposed body normativity. The solution to this can be found in actively and creatively engaging with the discourses produced by the platforms' probabilities. This form of direct engagement with the problematic discourses demonstrates a transaction between repressive platforms and progressive online activism. By working with, through and against the repressive discourses, the Body Positivity Movement is able to convert them to their own objective and destabilize its power.

6. Conclusion

This thesis set out to assess the online Body Positivity Movement, and the paradox that unfolds when a feminist movement finds itself embedded within the probabilities of social media platforms. The Body Positivity Movement understands body normativity, and related notions on body conventions and beauty ideals as an oppressing and excluding discourse. The movement uses social network sites as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and blogs a platform to express their subjectivity and present different representations, as the social media platforms enable them to create their own representations and expressions. It is for this very reason that many fat scholars and fat activists praise the potential of new media platforms for user participation, as it enables them to form a community, present new narratives and representations on marginalized bodies.

However, they fail to question the neutrality, or rather, lack thereof, of the very platforms they rely upon. This illustrates a larger debate on online activism, where the Internet's potential for citizen participation is met with criticism on the limitations of new media, and its relation to dominant, repressive power structures. This poses the question to what extent online activist movements are affected by the social media platforms they situate themselves on, and whether or not subversive online activism is possible, as these activist undertakings rely on platforms that are embedded in repressive discourses. Online activism can be limited by the cultural, social and technological affordances of social media platforms, as they become susceptible to the established conventions on social media use that reiterate the very repressive discourses they wish to subvert. The Body Positivity Movement illustrates this, as they denounce bodily norms and beauty standards, but simultaneously participate in the dominant communication culture of social media platforms that reinforce these norms. This thesis addresses this ambiguous relation between online activism and online platforms, as the cultural and technological affordances of these platforms problematize the self-representations of marginalized identities on social media. Manovich's concept of probabilities describes how the cultural conventions and technological affordances of a social media platform affect the use of the platforms. Using the concept of probabilities, this thesis addresses how the Body Positivity movement utilizes these social network sites as platforms to spread their message, but also how their activism can be affected or even limited by these platforms.

The Body Positivity Movement uses self-expression and self-representation on social media platforms to provide new narratives and representations of marginalized bodies. The use of Critical Discourse Analysis of the messages posted by the movement on blogs, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube reveals how their online self-representation relates to dominant power structures, as they

subvert and reiterate repressive discourses in their posts.

The members of the Body Positivity Movement use self-representation as a means of online activism, as it enables them to subvert dominant discourses on their marginalized bodies. As Goffman's theory of self-presentation explains, the body can convey signs that can be used to influence the observer's interpretation of one's identity (1956, 8, 13). It is this semiotic potential of bodily representation that is of importance in the self-representation of the members of the Body Positivity Movement in their selfies, as it enables them to communicate a certain image of themselves to their followers. Manovich refers to such photos as “strategic image,” when an image is for strategic intentions, such as conveying a specific impression (27). The activists of the Body Positivity Movement use the representation of their bodies, and even perform their fatness, to convey counter-discourses on the dominant, repressive narratives that marginalize their bodies. By performing their fatness, the body-positive activists not only reject the notion of the thin, fragile, female body by actively taking up more space (Hartley 61-62), they are also able to contradict the negative conceptions and stereotypes on fatness, and redefine their bodies on their own terms (Lupton 123-124; Saguy and Ward 14). Moreover, through the process of ostension, they movement may even be able to change people's perception of non-normative bodies, as their individual posts become the new model of reference for the entire community they represent.

Additionally, the activists go against the normative notions of self-representation on online platforms as well. The platforms' conventions and filters favor those who resemble or pursue the ideal subject, and exclude users who do not (Rettberg 23-25). In actively performing their deviancy, the activists of the Body Positivity Movement reject these conventions by claiming a space on the very platforms that normally work to exclude them. They perform their subjectivity on online platforms in response to these repressive discourses on non-normative bodies. Furthermore, they utilize various functions of the hashtag, not only to express their own identity in opposition of body normativity, but also to form a community and express their identity as part of this community. The hashtag then adds significance to the post, in that it actively portrays the user's performance of their identity and their redefinition of their marginalized body.

These points demonstrate how the Body Positivity Movement utilizes the characteristics of social media platforms of accessibility, networkability and user participation to express their subjectivity and provide new narratives and representations of non-normative bodies. The discourses they convey in their posts one the one hand disprove the notion of body normativity, but on the other, they convey an adjustment of body norms and beauty ideals, the difference being that where the former completely discards bodily norms, the latter aims to broaden the boundaries to a more inclusive and diverse notion of bodily norms, but in doing so, maintaining its repressive power.

The discourses conveyed in the first set of posts demonstrate how the movement subverts normative discourses through their self-representation on online platforms. In presenting new narratives and representations of marginalized bodies, these posts convey counter-discourses to the dominant, repressive discourses of body normativity in a variety of ways. Firstly, these discourses liberate the marginalized body from normative conceptions by refuting the obligation of pursuing the ideal body. Secondly, they actively go against the cultural conceptions of non-normative bodies, by showing off their deviation and debunk stereotypes. Lastly, they substitute body normativity in favor of a more diverse understanding of bodies and bodily subjectivity, and demand the humane treatment of all regardless of one's appearance.

However, other messages posted by the Body Positivity Movement convey a slightly different connotation. These posts connote that the body is malleable, and that body-confidence and body-acceptance is achievable through the performance of femininity and other aspects of the beauty ideal, and through the consumption of the right commodities. Rather than dismantling the body norms, these posts argue in favor of an expansion of these norms to include the represented bodies as well. In doing so, they reiterate and reinforce repressive discourses on beauty, femininity and neoliberalism, and support the very power structures they wish to subvert.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that the platforms' probabilities produce repressive discourses as well, which contradict the movement's own objective. The use of Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis reveals that the probabilities of the platforms play an active role in the production of discourse. These probabilities do not exist outside of code and signification, but rather convey dominant discourses. The platforms cultural conventions and technological affordances reiterate dominant, repressive power structures, which is then conveyed in the posts by the Body Positivity Movement as well.

The movement participates in online trends and subjects itself to the conventions of the platforms. Each platform has its own probabilities, which affect how the platform is used, what kind of content is posted on there, and what kind of discourses these posts convey. Its text-based rhetoric and conversational tools characterize Twitter as a platform for political discussions, which the Body Positivity Movement utilizes for contesting repressive notions of body normativity. However, the platform's probabilities also echo a rhetoric of actively expressing one's political engagement as neoliberal subjects. Instagram's emphasis on visual expression and the social convention of the selfie allow for the movement to present new representations, but in doing so, reiterate discourses on femininity, beauty ideals and commodification. Lastly, the vlogs posted on YouTube and the blogs posted by Elman provide a personal account of expressing their marginalized identity in a way that is reminiscent of a personal journal. In exposing their intimate

subjectivity to a public space, they expose themselves before a panoptic gaze as part of the ongoing neoliberal project of self-improvement and seeking the approval of others. The probabilities then produce the discourses in the Body Positivity Movement's posts which convey that self-exposure before the panoptic gaze as liberating, and that the body is malleable through the performance of femininity and other aspects of the beauty ideal, and though the consumption of the right commodities. A feminist movement using these platforms can prove to be problematic, as the discourses produced by the platforms' probabilities contradict and negate the movement's objective.

These observations on the effect of platform probabilities provide new insights for the research field of Fat Studies and its research into fat activism. In looking at the online Body Positivity Movement from a Media Studies perspective, the thesis rectifies the dupeable view of other Fat Studies scholars on the promising potential of digital media as a platform for the liberation of marginalized bodies. Pausé and Lupton demonstrate this view, as they argue that it enables users to generate content to present new narratives and new representations of marginalized identities controlled by marginalized identities (Pausé; Lupton 123). However, the analysis of this thesis provides a more critical stance on the potential of these platforms. The notion of complete control over self-representation on online platforms is disproven, as the usage of new media platforms is limited by its probabilities. This not only influences how the members of the movement utilize the platforms according to dominant conventions, but, more importantly, conveys repressive discourses in the messages posted on the platforms.

Furthermore, this thesis adds to the research on the Body Positivity Movement conducted by Gibson and Sastre, whose findings indicate a discrepancy in the movement's objective and the conveyed message of their posts, similar to the results of this thesis. Gibson argues that the movement reinforces notions of body normativity as they call for an expansion of bodily norms as opposed to a dismantling of it (Gibson). Additionally, Sastre states that the movement's posts on online platforms reiterate the problematic neoliberal discourse, as they form their subjectivity by voluntarily placing themselves as the object of a panoptic gaze in order to seek affirmation of others (936). Both argue that in order to overcome this discrepancy, the movement needs to return to their original, radical objective, which this thesis argues can be done by actively and creatively engaging with the discourses produced by the platforms' probabilities. By directly engaging with the repressive discourses produced by the platforms' probabilities, a transaction occurs between the movement's progressive discourse and the platforms' repressive discourse. By working with, through and against the repressive discourses, the Body Positivity Movement is able to convert them to their own objective and destabilize its power.

The Body Positivity Movement illustrates how new media platforms allow for user-generated content. The new digital technologies provide them with access to a platform they previously did not have. The Internet allows for a greater variety in perspectives to be represented, and for a greater variety in ways of representing those views. Its accessibility allows for a variety of actors to express their political views, and, more importantly, enables underrepresented identities to let their voices be heard in a way that was not possible before (Gerhards and Schäfer 4). The Body Positivity Movement exemplifies this as well, as they utilize the social media platforms in order to redefine their on representations and narratives in opposition of the repressive discourses that marginalize them. Moreover, digital media technologies present a vast spectrum of ways to participate in socio-political engagement, that encompasses new, creative forms of political participation (Christensen; Reed 124). The new media platforms allow activists to produce new, creative forms of activism that were unimaginable before. The potential of new media platforms lies in activists using these tools for new innovative and creative ways of activism. The Body Positivity Movement utilizes the accessibility and networkability features of new media technologies for obtaining information, creating content, and forming communities. More importantly, they transform the act of online self-representation and self-exposure into a new creative form of online activism, as they perform their identities to subvert repressive discourses, and form their subjectivity in opposition of normative conceptions on marginalized bodies.

That being said, it remains important to question the reliability of online activism on these platforms, as, they are embedded in bigger, repressive power structures. As Hoofd, Morozov and Sastre point out, new media technologies are embedded within a structure of neoliberal power relations (Hoofd 27; Morozov 213; Sastre 936). This then problematizes activist movements' use of these platforms, as it will make them depend on the same power structures they wish to denounce. When assessing the potential digital media offer for online activist movements such as the Body Positivity Movement, it is therefore important to address the limitations online media platforms produce in terms of authenticity and independence. The probabilities of the platforms utilized by the Body Positivity Movement produce repressive discourses on ideal subjectivity, which negate the movement's own objective. This illustrates how online media provide useful tools for activist undertakings, but present obstacles as well.

In some utterances, the Body Positivity Movement is able to circumvent the repressive discourses produced by the platforms' probabilities. In these cases, the activists engage with the probabilities in a transformative and creative way, as they partake in online trends and adhere to social media conventions, but also convert these to their own purpose. This demonstrates how subversive activism is possible on social network sites, despite the platforms' ties to dominant power structures. It is important to no longer assume the neutrality of the social media platforms,

and instead become aware of the influence of the probabilities of these platforms on the production of discourse. In doing so, the Body Positivity Movement will be able to engage in the platforms' probabilities and the repressive discourses they produce, in order to convert them and negate them. The posts by Masterselflove and Elman illustrate how critically and creatively engaging in the probabilities of the platform enables them to destabilize its repressive power. The act of engaging in the platforms' probabilities is then transformed into an act of rebellion, as they are able to subvert its repressive discourse while participating in the probabilities that produce them. This demonstrates Olszanowski's notion of "unexpected power in repression," as the transformative engagement converts the repressive discourses to the movement's own progressive objective (2014, 93). By creatively and critically engaging with the probabilities of the social media platforms, the movement is not only able to circumvent the repressive discourses these probabilities produce, but, more importantly, they are able to destabilize these discourses.

The analysis shows that the Body Positivity Movement uses Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs as platforms to subvert repressive notions on body normativity through self-representation, through which they are able to provide new narratives and representations of marginalized bodies. However, the probabilities of these social media platforms produce the discourse of the online Body Positivity Movement, as these conventions reiterate repressive discourses on femininity, beauty ideals and commodification. Furthermore, self-representation on social media as a form of online activism answers to the call for self-exposure before the panoptic gaze as part of the neoliberal rhetoric. These two phenomena create a discrepancy in the discourses conveyed in the social media posts by the Body Positivity Movement, as they simultaneously subvert and reiterate discourses on body normativity and neoliberal citizenship. But, as some posts of the movement illustrate, the movement is able to circumvent this discrepancy, when actively, critically and creatively engaging in the discourses produced by the probabilities of the platforms.

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