



# 5

## Fat, Black and Unapologetic: Body Positive Activism Beyond White, Neoliberal Rights Discourses

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### 5.1 Introduction

All bodies are good bodies. There's no wrong way to have a body. All bodies are beautiful. Beauty comes in every shape and size. Honor my curves. Plus is equal. It's time for us to reclaim our bodies. (Dionne 2017)

The above quote is a typical body positive statement. Over the past few years, messages of body positivity have spread rapidly in different types of media, being articulated by grass-roots activists and digital communities, as well as by a growing number of advertising campaigns and celebrities who are endorsing body positivity. News media circulate articles across social media platforms, with stories announcing women who, through the use of selfies, open up about their experiences with dealing with body

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shame, fat phobia, eating disorders and how they have challenged beauty ideals and ‘bikini body’ myths, achieving self-love, acceptance and pride.

Grown out of the western feminist critique of the ‘tyranny of slenderness’ and oppressive beauty standards, of the struggles against discrimination by the fat acceptance movement—as well as the fight by the queer movement—body positivity is about all bodies having a value and right to be visible and accepted. The goal of the movement is primarily to show diversity in the portrayal of women and to encourage the acceptance of all body types, skin colours and body flaws—especially marginalised bodies that are often invisible in current society. This movement particularly addresses issues of weight and size:

The body positive movement uses rhetoric rooted in empowerment to affirm women of size and encourage us to accept ourselves as we are, regardless of our dress size. (Dionne 2017)

Initially emerging in the West, body positivity is now an example of digital or online activism characterised by rhizomatic flows of images and narratives that circulate transnationally, primarily through various global social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. The manifestations of body positivity that gain the most attention are usually selfies posted by celebrities—for example, Khloe Kardashian showing ‘flaws’ such as stretch marks and teaching self-acceptance, or covers with plus size models, such as Tess Holliday, who was seen on the cover of *People’s Magazine* 2015.

Even so, body positivity activism is mainly practised through and within the so-called ‘fat-o-sphere’ and feminist or queer forums, some of which function as counter public spaces in which participants challenge and reinterpret bodies considered ‘deviant’, producing subcultural identities (see Le Besco 2004; Sastre 2016; Johansson 2017).

Although body positivity is being acknowledged for its achievements, such as pushing the fashion industry to include plus size fashion, it is also being subjected to criticism from people that were, or still are, body positive advocates themselves. It is argued that even though body positivity in the beginning was a radical position taken by fat feminists who refused to be invisible and who practised hardcore fat politics, body positivity has

now been ‘co-opted by the mainstream and become increasingly depoliticized’<sup>1</sup>. As the popularity of the body positive movement and the influence of its advocates have grown, corporations have commoditised these body positive advocates and used their influence to push products, capitalising off the movement. The body positive rhetoric is being used in attempts to ‘appropriate and repackage feminist discourse for personal consumption’ (Sastre 2016, 3–4).

Hence, it has been claimed that body positivity goes hand in hand with neoliberalism, and that since body positivity centres on the individual right to self-expression and self-acceptance, issues of power, social difference and institutional conditions tend to be made invisible and ignored (Sastre 2016; Johansson 2017). Moreover, a number of both non-white and white critics who themselves identify as body positivity activists have pointed out that the dominant norm for the ‘positive’ body still is the white, slender, able-bodied cis-women, and even though the movement often speaks about ‘diversity’, and of intersectionality, it does not often show it. Black body positive activist Sonia Renee Taylor argues that ‘As long as there is a movement that is only positive for some bodies, it’s not body positive’ (Feldman 2017) and Black Lives Matter activist Shackelford (2016) labels body positivity as ‘white feminism’.

With this context in mind, this chapter will explore the potential of body positivity to create new feminist futures beyond Eurocentric and neoliberal paradigms. Drawing on Butler (2015), the text explores how gendered and racialised bodies which are not recognised as political agents in hegemonic political spaces shape their own modes of appearance in the counter public spaces of body positivity.

With inspiration from rhizomatic thinking (Breslow and Mousoutzanis 2012), the ideas and practices of body positivism will be followed as they circulate and travel from place to place, moving between different media with the aim to explore, identify and create new connections and gendered and racialised relationships and meanings. The readings are made from the position of being a white, Swedish and fat cis-woman.

Although being characterised as a transnational community or movement, body positivity is also practised within the context of locality. Thus, I will provide some examples of how the central elements of the body positivity discourse are reiterated within the Swedish (mainstream) media

landscape. However, I am particularly interested in exploring attempts to contest and disrupt what has been defined as the white supremacism/norm of whiteness of body positivity as articulated and practised by women of colour through their social media platforms. By focusing on the privilege of whiteness, I also hope to illustrate how the transnationalism of body positivity is embedded in relations of power (de Jong and Dannecker 2018).

For the most part, my material consists of images and posts from the style and fashion blogs 'The Beauty and the Muse' by Leah Vernon, who is based in the USA, and 'Nerd about Town', which is run by Stephanie Yeboah who lives in the UK.<sup>2</sup> Both identify as black and fat (plus size) (cis) women and address body positivity. Leah V also identifies as Muslim and describes herself as a 'semi-modest model' and 'hijabi'. Thus, in addition, the issues of the 'religious' and 'secular body', respectively, are being raised, with both the religious and the secular seen as practised through specific body politics and as the embodiment of certain sets of conventions (Amir-Moazami 2016). Even though the bloggers live in the West, their conditions are shaped by being black and fat (cis) women, and are as such, on the fringe.

This chapter raises questions about the possibility of the expansion, redefinition and 'repoliticising' of body positivity. Does body positivity have to be about the right to be a consumer and individual liberation, something that is first and foremost for white, middle-class cis-women, or is there a potential for it to be about changing those structural conditions that deny certain bodies their value, space and right to existence?

The text will proceed as follows: In the next section, I elaborate on the importance of visibility in the body positive movement. Then, I give some examples of how body positivity is expressed within the Swedish context. In section 4, the issue of the privilege of whiteness is raised, followed by several sections that focus on various themes in the blogs of Leah V and Stephanie Yeboah. In the last section, I give the conclusions.

## 5.2 Politics of (in)Visibility

Visibility is of vital importance for the body positivity movement. Although public space historically has only granted visibility to thin, white, tall, cis-gendered, symmetrical and able-bodied individuals, body positivity challenges this privilege. Instead of remaining invisible or trying to hide bodies that are defined and seen as deviant, ugly, disgusting or weird, participants in the body positivist community expose their bodies.

Visibility is a significant tactic and goal for a number of social movements. The striving to get ‘out of the closet, into the streets’ has, for example, historically been central to LGBTQI politics in the US and Europe. And suggested by Stella (2012), political strategies based on visibility and recognition have actually become even more prominent since the 1990s:

Visibility is a force necessary for full subjectivity within a modernity built on a currency of surveillance and disclosure. The right to be seen—and the right to be recognized—is thus inevitably coded as a fundamental human right in the contemporary West. (Sastre 2016, 27)

However, visibility is a complex force; it can be used as a strategy and tactic of resistance, as well as a mechanism of power. As outlined by Foucault (1991), during different historical periods, distinct modes of visibility are produced by power to control society. For example, in her analysis of visibility and queer culture, Hennessy (1994) argues that increased visibility often goes hand in hand with commodification.

One main question for the current chapter is how visibility performed within the body positivity spaces can be understood both as a practice of resistance and as a way of reinscribing the body positivity into the discourses of neoliberal citizenship and the acceptable/white body.

Furthermore, I am attending to the (in)visibility paradox of institutional racism and the privilege of whiteness that, on the one hand, white bodies are all too visible, at the same time that bodies of colour are invisible or hypervisible through being fetishised and commoditised as ‘exotic’. On the other hand, whiteness as a particular racial identity is being and made invisible as the norm (Frankenberg 1993). My reading of the blogs

departs from the assumption that women of colour are rendered simultaneously invisible and hypervisible and that this positioning more specifically shapes the representation and experiences of their bodies. Thus, the invisibility of black femme bodies is juxtaposed with them being seen as spectacles; either on display to be ridiculed or as targeted in discussions on welfare as ‘welfare queens’ (Mowatt et al. 2013, 645).

### 5.3 Body Positivity: Contesting the Ideal of the Perfect Body

Body positivity is to be considered not only as a set of ideas, notions and values, but also as a set of discursive practices that are performed within and through primarily digital spaces, travelling across national borders in interconnected ways.

In Sweden, as in many other countries, those who gain the most attention for their messages of body positivity are celebrities. This is true not only because they have thousands of followers on Instagram and other social media platforms, but also because their pictures and body positive messages are often being picked up by local newspapers and television.

One of the first Swedish celebrities promoting body positivity was the artist Molly Sandén, who showed herself naked in her video for ‘Freak’, a song about self-hatred. As she explained, while she was worried that she would be shamed because of her weight, she instead received a lot of ‘love’ (Nilsson 2014). To inspire others to ‘be oneself’ and ‘feel pride’ over their bodies and to ‘boost each other’, Sandén then initiated the local Instagram campaign #överminstoltakropp, ‘over my proud body’.<sup>3</sup> This type of story of a journey from shame to pride, from self-hatred to self-acceptance, is a central narrative in the body positivity discourse and can be found in a variety of stories by women across the world (see, e.g., Sastre 2016).

Another body positive advocate is Lisa Ajax, a singer who was only 16 years old when she won Swedish Idol 2014. In a series of pictures posted on Instagram, she is shown in underwear in a pose exposing her stomach folds. Below the pictures, she writes (my translation): ‘All bodies

are good bodies' and continues by saying, 'One year ago, my view on a beautiful body was so incredibly skewed! For my body to be seen as beautiful it had to have bigger boobs (...) and a flat tummy ... all that I did not have and never will have (...)'. This post received nearly 20,000 likes.

The critique against body ideals and expectations—and the call for rebelling against these—are at the heart of the body positivity discourse. Molly Sandén contends that we are 'fed by monotonous images of how a body should look', and she encourages her readers to 'dare to expand the norm' beyond the current ideal, as well as 'accept' the diversity of bodies. Lisa Ajax argues along the same lines and writes about how 'tired' she is of the ideal of the 'perfect' body and how it 'has to stop'. Moreover, she states the following:

All bodies should be visible, on Instagram, on the beach, at the gym and so on. I don't want one person to feel less worthy because of hir appearance.

Similar to the many personal narratives of body positivity found across sites and campaigns, both Sandén (Nilsson 2014) and Ajax (Ek 2018) send the message of self-love. Hence, body positivity does not have the aim of changing one's body (its appearance or behaviour) but to transform the relation to and perception of one's body (Sastre 2016).

The ideas and practices of body positivity are organised around the act of exposing the body itself as empowering, 'imbued with the potential to liberate the newly exposed body from the cultural burdens of shame and disgust that kept it long hidden' (Sastre 2016, 56). Both Molly Sandén and Lisa Ajax perform the practice of exposing the type of bodies and/or body parts that are seen as shameful, as well as posing at angles that are considered 'unflattering'. The visible body becomes a symbol of—and seen as generating—a body positive feeling. Although the acts of Sandén and Ajax exposing 'flaws' are celebrated as individual acts of 'courage', full or partial nudity is actually both explicitly called to and inferred through a set of 'best practices' of body positivity (Sastre 2016).

I suggest that whether articulated in Sweden or elsewhere, the body positive discourse in mainstream media asserts itself as part of a transnationally circulating postfeminist culture (Dosekun 2015), with a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment, and with 'a psychologizing

discourse and promotion of female “confidence”, self-love and self-esteem as one-size-fits-all solutions to gender injustice’ (Gill 2016, 6). For example, as explained by Nigerian body positive advocate Temi Aboderin-Alao (Ndeche 2017) who aims to ‘empower curvy women’ with her plus size brand, ‘It all starts in the mind. If you’re feeling down about yourself, you’re not going to get confident enough to get up and change your life and be who you want to be.’ However, the body positive messages and practices do in no way travel in an unidirectional way from the global North/West to the global South/non-West (see Dosekun 2015). Rather, their movements across transnational contexts are both multidirectional and unpredictable.

## 5.4 The Privilege of Whiteness

Drawing on a feminism which in a complex way is intertwined with neo-liberalism, the body positive celebration of the differentiation of bodies, and the message that ‘all bodies are good bodies’, often ignores social differences and how economic, cultural and political conditions and forces shape the possibilities of the body (Sastre 2016; Johansson 2017). While dominant body ideals are contested it is rarely acknowledged that these ideals are measured along Eurocentric, white standards, meaning the narratives, images and ideals of ‘good bodies’ are heavily racialised. As posited by Shaw (2006) the conceptualisation of idealised femininity as exclusively white is an important means of sustaining racialised hierarchies since it can concurrently devalue both race and gender. Pointing out and criticising the norm of whiteness of body positivity Shackelford (2016) argues that:

Tess Holliday’s success would be unheard of if she was a person of color or Black. Being shorter, having more visible cellulite and not having an hour-glass shape would make Tess’ success impossible if she were a person of color too. (Shackelford 2016)

According to Shackelford and many other critics, since body positivity has gone mainstream, and become more commercialised, white (cis)



women's bodies have become even more visible than before. The face of body positivity has indeed become more agreeable to a mostly white audience.

Thus, when Gibson (2017) examines the images displayed on top posts found under the hashtags #bodypositive and #bodypositivity on Instagram, she finds that they frequently reproduced normative body representations. While sixty-four of the ninety-eight top posts featured a thin and white woman, only fourteen featured persons of colour, and only nine were of fat women of colour. In my own snapshot of images displayed using the Swedish hashtag #kroppspositiv (body positive), of 8917 posts I find that among the first 200 images featuring bodies, there were only four images of non-white bodies.

Even though many body positivity advocates such as the Swedish artists Sandén and Ajax call for diversity, they seldom address the fact that by being white they themselves actually conform with the main aspects of the dominant gendered body and beauty ideal. At the same time that they claim that all bodies are valuable and beautiful, and, as Lisa Ajax suggested, 'all bodies should be visible', they fail to recognise that being white is what Kwan (2010) calls a body privilege.

The colour blindness of body positivity, as articulated across different transnational contexts, needs to be understood in relation to whiteness as a site of power, and its intersections with other categories such as gender, race, culture and citizenship. As in the specific local context of mainstream Swedish media, it may be understood in relation to whiteness as a significant (and invisible) structuring principle for Swedishness, and particularly in relation to the regime of 'good whiteness', associated with gender equality, humanism and antiracism (Hübinette and Lundström 2014). The 'proud' bodies of body positive advocates Sandén and Ajax are indeed expressions of white, Swedish femininity.

Since whiteness as a norm and a privilege to a large part is being treated as a non-issue by many body positive advocates, and in the mainstream body positive discourse, the racialisation of bodies tends to be made invisible, and the experiences of women of colour/non-white people within the body positive community being silenced. Hence, it is against this backdrop that the blogs of Leah Vernon and Stephanie Yeboah become of particular interest; they are examples of how fat, femme and

black bodies claim visibility and create space for themselves in social media, highlighting issues of race and racism in relation to body positivity and the contradictions that lie in a heightened visibility for the ‘invisible’.

## 5.5 Fatshion Blogs as Arenas for Community Building and Performance of Identities

A black, large woman standing outside in a park, with a background of bushes and trees. She wears a kind of fitted jumpsuit in velour in a deep red color with a blouse with flowers under. With that, she wears a red turban as well as sunglasses and lipstick in red. Her hands are firmly planted on her hips, looking straight into the camera.

This is a typical image of Leah V posted on her blog. She calls her social media a platform for ‘a social and fashion movement’ that ‘encompasses all the different facets of my style and ideas’:

You’ll see how I rock street style to vintage glam but this just isn’t about beauty, every photo is paired with meaningful content about feminism, social justice, divorce, and body positive activism.<sup>4</sup>

She emphasises that it is about fashion and beauty, but also about ‘meaningful content’. Moreover, that the aim for the blog ‘Beauty and the Muse’ is not about ‘numbers or stats or saying the right thing ever so perfectly, but to create and build a community of creatives’. Key words for Leah V are creativity, dialogue, reflection, sharing and, not the least, community. She guarantees her readers that ‘You get a front row seat to my life’s journey. Pull up a chair ...’. Stephanie Yeboah, for her part, explains the following about her blog:

serves as a personal space for me to share my personal style, rave about some beauty bits, and to talk about issues important to me such as body confidence, mental health, loving yourself (...).<sup>5</sup>

She hopes 'to inspire and teach others to be happy and confident in how you look, to wear whatever you want and feel amazing and to just go on living your best life'. Stephanie's presentation does not emphasise political issues and social change but mainly uses the rhetoric of body positivity focused on individual fulfilment. Both Leah V and Stephanie Yeboah make a living through blogging and modelling. Thus, they practice self-branding (or personal branding), meaning that they have developed a distinctive public image for commercial benefit and embrace body positivity and/or to gain cultural capital (Khamis et al. 2016). As Leah V comments in her introduction:

That intro wasn't to get you to feel sorry for me. For us. It was to pique your interest. To pull you in. Get you to see something you've probably haven't even fathomed.<sup>6</sup>

She does not want to be seen as a victim; rather, she intends instead to 'pique' the interest of the reader. It is a way of representing herself as interesting, even as an enigma.

Style and fashion blogs have been identified as arenas in which marginalised consumers, in this case, young, racialised women self-identified as fat, have managed to become influential (Kretz and de Valck 2014). As fatshion bloggers, Leah V and Stephanie bring forward plus size clothes and spread body positive messages. Both bloggers have created a public image that respond to the needs and interests of target audiences, mainly other fat/plus size, femme-identified persons of colour, and are benefiting from those images. At the same time, both Stephanie Yeboah and Leah V take part in the building of the body positive community as an alternative community that attempts to create new social realities and intersectional identities (Harju and Huovinen 2015; Kretz and de Valck 2014). In a post in which Stephanie brings up the issue of shopping outside your size, here giving advice on which mainstream brands are 'stretch friendly', she assumes her readers to be 'fat', sharing the same experiences and challenges that she experiences:

When you're fat, clothing labels inadvertently end up becoming a huge part of our identity because of how restrictive fashion is when it comes to

extended sizes (...). We collectively give an exasperated sigh when a designer x high street collaboration abruptly ends at a size 16 (...).<sup>7</sup>

The use of expressions as ‘our identity’ and ‘our sizes’ indicates that she takes a shared identity for given and speaks of a ‘we’ that ‘collectively give an exasperated sigh’. The body positivity/plus size community is perceived as a community of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006). However, while creating and articulating a sense of belonging in a ‘plus size’ and body positive community on the basis of size, she also expresses disbelonging based on race.

Being in a community full of people who have the same body shape as you in terms of they’re fat, but then realising that you’re the only person of colour (...) it kind of makes me feel like, why are we not good enough to be at the forefront? (...) It’s ironic seeing as the body/fat positivity movement was spearheaded by black fat femmes years ago yet we are somehow erased from all of it. (Barrett 2017)

Identifying herself as a ‘fat black woman/femme’, she is among those in the body/fat positivity movement that has been ‘erased’. Leah V also addresses experiences of invisibility and marginalisation based on both race, gender, religion and body size:

I’m the unseen. The lost and broken. I’m the minority who is buried under media outlets like Fox News and CNN. You don’t see us on the cover of American magazines or hear the pleas of our communities.

I’m Muslim. I’m Black. I’m fat. I’m a female living in America.

## 5.6 Making Visible Black and Fat Bodies: Shaming, Disgust and Dehumanisation

To make yourself visible, and expose yourself as a fat, black woman on the internet who embraces body positivity, challenges various orders of power, and provokes many reactions. In a video addressed to her social media ‘trolls’, Leah V reads out some of the comments she has received:

I want to vomit. That's just disgusting. That's not a message of positivity. Such a disgrace to humanity.<sup>8</sup>

Leah V's fat body is being labelled 'disgusting' and 'a disgrace' and works as a surface onto which a multitude of signs and emotions are *stuck*, most of them with negative signification (Ahmed 2004). It is a body to expel through vomiting, what Kristeva (1982) defines as abjection. Yet another hostile comment is as follows:

I'd kill myself if I looked like that. How is that healthy? That is obese. And she'll die of heart failure.<sup>9</sup>

One of the recurrent points of critique directed at the notion and practice of body positivity is that it works as a 'defence' for obesity and a refusal to participate in the 'war against obesity'. Body positive activists are, as in this comment, defined as 'irresponsible' citizens.

In the prevalent obesity discourse, fatness is represented as a contagious disease, as dirt and uncleanness that threatens the social order (Douglas 1966), a 'matter out of place'. The fat body is associated with gluttony and a lack of control of desires and emotions. Fat people are, for example, often the targets of what Björck (2013) call 'metaphoric animalizations' of a degrading character; thus, they are being dehumanised. Leah gives examples of this in one of her blog posts when she describes how a woman put 'pig emojis' below her exercise video and that another person commented: 'I didn't know land whales exercised.'<sup>10</sup>

The fat body is linked to women and femininity (Johansson 2017), but obesity and the 'obesity epidemic' is not only feminised, but also racialised. As Sanders (2013) analyses how political, public health and cultural discourses recursively emphasise the higher prevalence of obesity among minorities in general—and among African American and Latina women in particular—she defines these discourses as a contemporary 'racial project', strengthening white normativity.

Stephanie accounts for how accustomed she is to receiving comments both of racist and fatphobic character online:

Over the last year, I've been called a gorilla (...), the N word countless times.<sup>11</sup>

Once again, metaphoric animalisation is used, but in contrast to 'pig' and 'whale', the epithet 'gorilla' is racialised, here specifically attributed to non-white bodies.

Although white women in the body positive movement who are considered to be fat are fighting back against fat stigma, they still have a body privilege (Kwan 2010) as whites, something of which Leah V and Stephanie are deprived. And although they are celebrated as body positive advocates and plus size models, as declared by Stephanie:

Being black and plus size in this industry means that you're sometimes treated way different from others, even if the people treating you differently do not want to admit it.<sup>12</sup>

She continues by arguing for her and other black women's right to be 'treated with a little bit of humanity', thus addressing a central aspect of racism: dehumanisation.

The appearance of the bodies of Leah V and Stephanie in digital public spaces do not only contest gendered body norms of thinness, but also the privileged white gaze that view black bodies as a disruption of the presumed harmony and symmetry of the white space (Yancy 2008). Because fat and black femme bodies are equally being constructed as 'bodies out of place', they might be defined by what Puwar (2004) calls 'space invaders'. In Stephanie's words: 'I have had things thrown at me for defending my right to exist and take up space as a fat, black woman.'

## 5.7 Not the Perfect Hijabi

Leah V also addresses racism, for example, by writing about the situation after 9/11, with a special focus on Islamophobia, violence and prejudices against Muslims. However, whereas she strongly identifies herself as part of the Muslim community, she also brings up a sense of disbelonging based on her blackness, stating that 'Although it is totally against Islam to

judge someone based on the colour of their skin, it happens more than you think.’ She tells various stories about occasions when she has experienced racism by fellow Muslims because she is black. Leah V’s celebration of body positivity is intertwined with a critique of gender norms and white privileges. Because she also identifies as a feminist, she raises critique against the norms of how Muslim woman should be within her family and in the community:

Hijab is crucial. You don’t wear hijab, life is almost over and you have elders questioning your religion.<sup>13</sup>

Even though Leah V always wears a hijab, she claims the right to be a ‘hijabi’ in her own way and for her own reasons. When speaking on a panel organised by a Muslim student organisation on the theme of how body positivity and fashion is related to authenticity, she brought up the ideal of the ‘perfect hijabi’:

You know I’m really tired of the Hijabi bloggers being so damn perfect. (...) They are all thin, usually white passing with the perfect wardrobe and the most perfect pastel Instagram aesthetic.<sup>14</sup>

According to Leah V, ‘the perfect hijabi’ is white/whitewashed, thin and performs a traditional ‘femininity’. The ‘perfect hijabi’ bloggers do not address topics such as ‘sexual abuse, misogyny, racism, and body-shaming’, and she calls them out, challenging them to ‘be real’ to instead of ‘pushing perfection’ promote ‘individuality’ and create their ‘own unique path’.

This call echoes the emphasis on authenticity within the body positive discourse. Yet the way Leah V defines this individuality seems to be a result of a hybridisation, of the negotiation of plural social identities and belongings, and of intersectionality:

We are not only Arab or Middle Eastern. We are not only hijabi. We are not only ‘straight-sized’. Or submissive. We are African-American. (...). Fat. And more.<sup>15</sup>

## 5.8 From Self-Hatred and Shame to Self-Acceptance and Self-Love

What then does body positivity mean for these two bloggers? In a post from 2016, Leah V tells the story of how she became a body positive advocate, stumbling ‘into the phrase’ two years earlier and describing herself as ‘immediately enthralled’:

Wait a minute! I didn't have to hate myself when I was around girlfriends that were smaller than me? I could actually do my makeup and wear a bomb outfit and feel equally beautiful? I could love my body and be ok with it (...)? Sign me up!<sup>16</sup>

Body positivity is defined as the opposite of self-hatred and feeling ugly and a way to promote self-love and ‘feel equally beautiful’. Moreover, it is the opposite of being worried and regretful about one's weight, hence the opposite of guilt and of shame, as follows:

One day, I asked myself what if I loved and appreciated my body how it was in that exact moment? (...) What would it look like to accept my body as it is?

As for the precursor to the body positivity movement, the fat acceptance movement, acceptance is a central concept, which is true for Leah V. In another post, she explicitly speaks about the fight against shame:

I made a decision to stop carrying other people's shame on my back, on my chest. (...). I plucked that shame bare, chopped it up, seasoned it, dropped that bitch in some batter and fried it.<sup>17</sup>

Emotions are crucial in creating a sense of community (Ahmed 2004) and in a similar way as the LGBTIQ movement and in the construction of queerness, shame and pride are important elements in the fat acceptance and body positivity movement. Between those who have experienced marginalisation and stigmatisation, a connection and sense of community emerges, one that is based in identification and compassion.



Thus, shame is given a political value because it connects a member to a community.

Still, shame is supposed to be replaced with pride. To ‘take care of yourself’, be ‘worthy’, be ‘beautiful’ and be ‘positive’ rather than self-critical are the fundamental messages of body positivity. The responsibility is placed on the individual to go through this process from negativity to positivity. This involves the risks of reproducing neoliberal stories of success, in which the stigmatised person is assumed to struggle to overcome the inner obstacles of shame and self-hatred to become a ‘positive’ person who loves one’s body and accepts oneself (Sastre 2016), what Dionne (2017) calls ‘affirming, empowering, let-me-pinch-a-fat-roll-to-show-how-much-I-love-myself stories’. Hence, to express experiences of shame and anger in the face of stigmatisation and discrimination might be perceived as a disruption of the body positive norm.

This norm of positivity is very much present in a text in which Stephanie shares her struggles with being accepting of her body and loving towards herself

I’ve been on this slow-ass train to self-love and body acceptance since 2014, and over the past 4 years, myself—like many others on this journey—have had great highs and devastating lows.<sup>18</sup>

She thinks she is much more ‘confident’ than she was when she was younger and states, ‘I’m wearing pieces I never would have ever thought of wearing, and I feel a lot more confident in my body than ever before.’

Self-love is something you are assumed to achieve through hard work, what Stephanie calls ‘self-care’. This practice of disciplining the relationship to one’s body is in line with ‘responsibilization’ (Rose 1996), a central principle of governing in an advanced liberal society. Whereas Stephanie writes and talks in public about the importance of ‘loving yourself’ and ‘give[s] tips’ on body confidence, sharing her ‘favorite ways to practice self-care’,<sup>19</sup> she confesses in the same post that she has a hard time practicing what she preaches:

The last three weeks have been terrible for me (...), mental health wise. I’ve been scrutinising every inch of my body and hating absolutely everything.

(...) I've always said that the journey to self-love is just that: a journey, and not specifically a destination.

I've come to accept the fact that even though I 'preach' body confidence, it's still okay for me to have days where I feel rubbish about how I look, and that's fine. It doesn't make me any less of a 'body positivity' person.

The blogger seems aware that with her recurrent experience of self-hatred and insecurity, she does not achieve the norm of body positivity, but her way to deal with it is to acknowledge the dilemma and (re)define self-love as a journey without a destination—that is, a process, not an absolute state of mind. Included in Stephanie's call for self-love is also her promotion of Curvissa, an online company that offers plus size fashion and uses the slogan 'Feel good dressing':

I believe getting to know yourself and accepting/embracing your, flaws and all is such a huge step towards self-love, and it's because of this that I'm thrilled to be collaborating with Curvissa on their new [#EmbracingMe](#) campaign, which is encouraging women to celebrate what they are most proud about themselves.<sup>20</sup>

She then continues by encouraging her readers to participate in the campaign to win a prize from the company.

For Stephanie, as for many other *fatshionista* bloggers, the promotion of products and campaigns is part of blogging as business, and the body activism is inescapably entangled with commercial interests (Cwynar-Horta 2016). And while the public display and promotion of plus size fashion is considered as one expression of the struggle against body shame and discrimination, it is at the same time part of a commodification process, and in line with the idea of the right to consume—a vital ideological element in neoliberalism (Guthman and du Puis 2016). Thus, the body positive messages conveyed by Stephanie's blog do to some extent intertwine with the idea that even the achievement of self-love and self-actualisation is brought about through consumption.

## 5.9 Doing Beauty and Self-Love Through Exposure

Hundreds of images are posted on Stephanie Yeboah's Instagram account, and in many of them, she is posing semi-nude, dressed in different models and colours of lingerie. Some of the images are also posted and commented upon in her blog. At first sight, these images support the suggestion made by Harju and Huovinen (2015) that because of an aspiration to access 'the realm of normalcy' and social acceptance, *fatshionistas* perform a femininity that resembles that of traditional fashion imagery, for example, mimicking the lowered gaze.

However, in addition to challenging fatphobia, Stephanie also challenges the body privilege of whiteness and the shame of being 'black'. This shows in the comments she makes, for example below an image of her striking a pose, lying down in red lingerie: 'Bitch, I never knew red could look so nice against my dark brown skin tone.'<sup>21</sup> Through the underwear and bras, she rediscovers her 'dark brown skin tone' and describes her appearance in positive wordings. Departing from the notion of black women being invisible, she states, 'We need to see (in my case) more black women and women of color represented.'<sup>22</sup> Hence, it is not about showing any flesh but a flesh in a colour that is not usually seen. And it is ultimately about being 'humanised'.

Stephanie dismisses a critique of the body positive movement from a celebrity/actress who was said to be 'sick and tired of seeing half-naked bodies on social media under the guise of body positivity' and direct herself to the woman, saying that the movement for body positivity is not for her or her 'aesthetically beautiful body':

Your body is seen everywhere: in movies, on billboards, on TV shows, magazines, online, in blogs and in music videos. Your privileged body is normalised. For those whose bodies aren't privileged, we NEED to see our body types on TV, in magazines and online. Social media platforms such as Instagram allows us to have a safe space to celebrate our curves.<sup>23</sup>

Stephanie exposes her own body as one of the invisible and unprivileged bodies in a very deliberate way and further defines it as a ‘need’ to see the images of ‘imperfect’ bodies to identify with:

I need to see a constant carousel of these images; of women with stretch marks, lumps, bumps, cellulite, and rolls. I need to see ‘imperfection’. I need to see women who look like me. I want to see plus size women looking hot in lingerie because it helps me feel better about what I wear, and allows me to see the beauty in myself.

As she looks at and identifies with ‘flawed bodies’, she rejects the dominant body ideal and argues for an alternative beauty. She speaks of the importance to have access to the images of bodies to identify with ‘imperfect’ bodies. This is a way to ‘feel better’ about her own appearance and to ‘see the beauty in herself’. Yet even though she claims the right to pursue ‘a beauty of imperfection’ and work on herself to look beautiful, her main concern seems to be, as for Leah, to *feel* beautiful. The visible body is partly seen as means for developing a sense of self-love and as a way to achieve a positive feeling:

I’ve always been wary of putting up photos of myself in lingerie, partly because of family/co-workers who may come across it (...), and also because I’m still getting to grips to loving myself and putting myself out there for all to see—hyperpigmentation and stretch marks be damned.<sup>24</sup>

To expose your body with all its presumed flaws, fatness, hyperpigmentation and stretch marks, to put yourself ‘out there for all to see’ is seen as part of the process of achieving ‘self-love’.

The right to be seen as, and feel, beautiful is a vital element in body positivity (Sastre 2016). All bodies can and have the right to be beautiful, even if they do not meet the dominant standards of beauty. Nevertheless, because ‘doing’ beauty is a vital component of ‘doing’ femininity, as well as whiteness, it also makes it problematic to claim this right. Stephanie’s struggle with self-love, and to see herself as ‘beautiful’ despite her ‘imperfection’ simultaneously works as a reinforcement of expectations of women to a constant ‘work’ on and struggle to improve themselves.

Success in being body positive does in this sense follow the model of neoliberal citizenship and depends on the ability of self-governance (Rose 1996).

Murphy and Jackson (2011) argue that even though magazines promote 'new' positive 'love your body' messages, they still encourage a gendered surveillance that reinforces the hegemony of the visual, as well as positioning women as objects for the male gaze. This ambivalence is also true for body positive blogs, to some extent; they might be both spaces of comfort and flattery, but they can also be seen as spaces of surveillance, both by oneself and by others (Rocamora 2013). And although visibility seems to be unequivocally understood as a means of empowerment by many whom advocate for body positivity, Stephanie expresses concerns about how her body, as other fat women's bodies, runs the risk of being fetishised when being exposed in the digital sphere or elsewhere. She defines herself as 'perpetually confined to the extreme version of sexuality', doubting her own 'sex appeal' as 'normally defined'.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, a racialised fat body runs the risk of being fetishised by a white gaze as well, becoming hypervisible as a body associated with the persistent stereotype of the sexually unrestrained black woman.

*Fatshion/plus size* bloggers can be said to disturb and undermine the politics around body size, gender, beauty and consumerism that dominate the fashion world and are creating a virtual counter discourse and new communities of belonging (Connell 2013; Johansson 2017). Furthermore, they contribute to the emergence of new norms of beauty and practice an aesthetics of resistance (Kwan and Graves 2013). Even so, the claim that also fat (black) bodies should be considered beautiful and attractive contributes to the objectification and commodification of the body and the 'positive' body, as well as illustrating how 'positivity' might become a way to control bodies and keep them 'in order' and under surveillance (Kyrölä 2014, 205).

## 5.10 Refusing 'Sexiness': Claiming Fierceness

Whereas Stephanie deliberately exposes her body and expresses a desire for being defined as 'sexy' in a 'normal' way while not being fetishised, Leah V, on the other hand, is caught up in a somewhat different struggle. Identifying as Muslim, fat and black 'semi-covered model', she deals with the issues of body exposure in relation the expectations of sexiness (especially in the fashion world) and how to practice her own version of *modesty*, as seen in the following:

Because I grew up Muslim, we weren't taught to be sexy. (...) There was no need for a Muslim girl to feel or be sexy at all. The extreme end of modesty was humble, colorless, loose clothes, bare face. The idea that you shouldn't want or feel the need to be seen. Lower your gaze.<sup>26</sup>

In the blog post 'The Unconventional: Thriving As A Covered Model', Leah is pictured coming up from a subway station in New York, dressed in a black dress with a white blouse with long sleeves under. Her turban is black, and so are her sunglasses. As usual, she does not show any other parts of the body than her hands, neck and face. She writes the following:

Sometimes I think it'd be easier to show my ass. I mean my entire meaty ass that's filled with fat craters and stretch marks. Like the whole thing sitting up on a sink like I see the other gals doing.<sup>27</sup>

She dryly notes that it costs both more money and is more difficult to be a model who practices modesty:

Sex sells. Bare skin sells. And, oh, I forgot to add, this only works for certain body types. Not all bodies get to show and be empowered by semi-nudity. Only the right kind of bodies get that right. The right kind of thin. And the right kind of thicc or curvy.<sup>28</sup>

Leah V goes on in the same post by affirming that she 'totally agrees' with a statement she had read 'nudity empowers some and modesty empowers others'. What she turns against is that modesty is defined as 'prudishness'

and that 'it equals being confined to one stereotype. It equals less popular. The inability to be sexy, feel sexy, be fierce.' She claims the right to be seen as 'fierce', even though she is a 'Muslim girl', without showing bare skin and practising body exposure:

But, when I do step up, I am serving looks so hard that I want to make them forget that they have a Muslim girl on set. I am so fierce that all they see is a girl that will kill that shot every single time.<sup>29</sup>

Her striving to be fierce is notable, fierce here being associated with being 'bold', 'cool', outstanding or 'brutal', especially relating to fashion, clothes, hair or [make-up](#), denoting a positive estimation of some aesthetic style (Bost 2019, 56). Moreover, fierce and fierceness are also terms that reoccur in relation to black resistance (Davis 2018), which are seen as strategies to survive both racism and homophobia.

This understanding of fierceness is helpful when taking considering Leah V's images and videos on her social media platform, for example, her solo dance video.<sup>30</sup> When dancing, she wears different sets of outfits, being dressed in black trousers and a black sweater, different jackets (denim/black) and wearing turbans in different colours and a hijab in combination with a cap. The music is electronic and hard, and she moves with forceful movements, including some voguing.<sup>31</sup> While she does smile in some shootings, her face is for the most part stern, looking directly into the camera, close up. Her dance is not a dance that can be associated with a 'good and happy fatty' performance, neither is it an attempt to achieve 'sexiness'. Rather it is an 'in your face' dance, embodying fierce as being 'to unravel, to self-actualize and to return the gaze' (Moore 2012, 72).

I suggest that Leah performs fierceness as a method of black and fat resistance, but also as a resistance against the norm of the 'feminine' Muslim body. She moves between the position of being a 'modest' Muslim/black woman, following the prescriptions of the 'acceptable' way Muslim women are to present themselves while at the same time trying to position herself as a feminist and 'fierce' model. She delinks fierceness from any presumed expectations of 'sexiness' and performs it in her own way, without exposure of any body parts or movements or dressing that

could be viewed as sexually ‘provocative’; in a sense, she is dissolving the division between a religious (modest) and secular (sexy) body.

The fierceness of Leah V is also an embodiment of a stance that in the body positivity community is talked about as ‘being unapologetic’ and is seen as a vital practice of body positivity.

## 5.11 Being Unapologetic

The message of being unapologetic, especially not apologising for one’s body, is reiterated in texts and narratives on body positivity circulating in different media, such as in one of the most celebrated body positivity books, *The body is not an apology: Radical self love* by Sonia Renee Taylor, or as in the following instructions: ‘Body Positivity: How To Love Your Body Unapologetically!’ To be unapologetic can, in this context, first and foremost be understood as a stance or approach in relation to body norms or expectations, a refusal to put up with being body shamed and to be ashamed of your body. In this sense, it is close to the resistance strategy of destigmatisation (Harju and Huovinen 2015).

Becoming unapologetic appears to be a significant element of becoming ‘positive’. Stephanie gives the story of how she began to shape her blog into a style and fashion blog when she visited New York in 2014 and met a group of plus-sized women who ‘were confident, beautiful women who were unapologetic in their bodies’:

I would see them wearing the kinds of clothes I wished I could wear, and it inspired me to seek change within myself, starting with my self-esteem and confidence.<sup>32</sup>

Meeting the women who were ‘unapologetic in their bodies’ is depicted as a turning point, and the inspiration from the women is associated with an inner, emotional process of developing a sense of self-esteem and confidence. Even so, in a post called ‘Being unapologetic can be hard’, Stephanie Yeboah challenges the body positive norm of ‘being unapologetic’, particularly from the position of ‘black and plus size’:



Peers and brands alike can sometimes assume that because we are unapologetic in the way in which we express ourselves, that we aren't capable of having feelings. Or that we don't feel hurt, or feel targeted and excluded. We are labelled as 'aggressive' and then treated horribly and are expected to just put up with it (...).<sup>33</sup>

Even though white fat women within the body positive movement may be celebrated for their adoption of an unapologetic stance, for women of colour and black women, the same stance risks being interpreted through the lens of stereotyping, including the myth of the uncontrolled angry black woman (Givens and Monahan 2005). She risks being seen as a 'killjoy' (Ahmed 2010), 'being in the way':

You will be labelled 'difficult' for standing up in what you believe in and asking for equality in campaigns (...).

Stephanie does not even shy away from bringing up the embraced notion of 'the strong black woman':

I'm tired of the narrative of black fat women being 'sassy', resilient and 'strong'. We have to be strong because we have been born into a world that does not respect us by large. We have been born into a society that continues to dehumanise us, that doesn't see us as equal.<sup>34</sup>

Being 'unapologetic' is here given a different meaning than in the dominant body positive rhetoric. It is not only about contesting the body privilege of slenderness (Kwan 2010), but it is about refuting white body privilege, not only about claiming the right to be seen as 'beautiful' and accepting oneself but claiming the right to exist. As Leah V asserts in the following:

I won't be apologizing for my mere being. For being fat. For being Black. For being Muslim. I've said sorry enough by assimilating. By keeping quiet. By accepting abuse and ridiculous requests (...).<sup>35</sup>

When she tells the story of how she got the idea of the dance video, she emphasises how her presence in the street actually makes a statement:

I believed that a fat girl dancing. A Muslim girl dancing in the streets of Detroit would make for a powerful statement, a conversation on what an American Muslim looks like? What a modern-day fat girl looks like? An overly educated black girl?<sup>36</sup>

In this text, Leah shifts between identifying herself as ‘fat girl’, ‘Muslim girl’, ‘American Muslim’, ‘modern day fat girl’ and ‘overly educated black girl’. To be visible on the street is a ‘powerful statement’ in relation to being a gendered fat, black and Muslim body. She continues with the following:

I knew (...) that I might get backlash from the opposing side, too. ‘Why is that Muslim girl dancing?!? She shouldn’t be doing that. It’s not Islamic!’ ‘She’s so fat, why is she embarrassing herself?’

While Stephanie articulates her desire to be acknowledged as hurting, Leah V is counting on the fact that her embodied presence in public space creates discomfort, anger and resentment. Making people ‘uncomfortable’ with her ‘mere presence’ ‘tickles’ her—that my presence, my essence is that powerful’. Consequently, she begins her dance video by looking straight into the camera, asking the imagined viewers sternly: ‘Do I make you uncomfortable?’ Daring to challenge the historical denial of black (Muslim) women’s right to look, her direct gaze can be defined as oppositional and as resistance (hooks 1992).

## 5.12 Concluding Remarks: Body Positivity as a Challenge to White Supremacy?

As *fatshion*/plus size bloggers advocating body positivity, both Stephanie and Leah V operate in the nexus of the market and civil society. Body positivity is, to a great extent, understood in terms of ‘individuality’, ‘self-love’ and the right to consumption, reiterating a transnational postfeminist discourse in which neoliberal elements are central. Yet at the same time, in contrast to the messages from, for example, the Swedish body positivity advocates, who convey decontextualised body positive

messages without acknowledging their own body privileges as whites, the visual practices and texts posted by Stephanie Yeboah and Leah V contribute to a situatedness of body positivity and an acknowledgement of social difference; they display how the intersectional dynamic of race, gender, sexuality and religion shape the expressions of body shaming and the production of a proud body: they are unapologetic in their bodies. By situating their own bodies in a web of power relations and practices of resistance and talking back (hooks 1990) to a multitude of audiences, they highlight how bodies not only are gendered, but also racialised. In doing so, they also expose the unequal nature of body positivity as a transnational community of belonging.

To further support the argument of the repoliticising body positivity by taking the privilege of whiteness and racism into account, I turn to Black Lives Matter activist Ashley Shackelford (2016), who identifies as queer, non-binary, fat and femme. Ze<sup>37</sup> actually redefines and expands the meaning of body positivity from being about individual empowerment to underscoring those structural conditions that deny some bodies their value, space and right to existence:

In light of the heightened violence against Black folks worldwide, it's imperative that we remember that when we talk about body positivity, fat positivity and the movement to end body shame, that Black Lives Matter is inherently a body positivity movement. Our fight to be humanised, end white supremacist violence, protect our bodies, our children, our families, our people, is a body positive movement.

Ze demands on her blog that organisations and corporations promoting body positivity and plus size, as well as body positive bloggers, have to take a stand against the violence that black people are subjected to around the world. Aside from being mocked and stared at, these bodies are also sexually assaulted, confined and murdered because 'they're are not seen as human'. Thus, dehumanisation does not only cause injuries such as shame and degradation, but the consequences are also deadly.

Although not recognised as political agents in hegemonic political spaces, Stephanie Yeboah and Leah Vernon, through the claim of the visibility of their black, fat and femme bodies, perform a kind of body

politics, a politics on the fringe and in-between. Historically rendered invisible and excluded from white spaces, their embodied presence in digital spaces challenges white supremacy as a central logic and arrangement of visibility. In spite of that they, for the most part, move within 'body positive' spaces, they evoke discomfort and become targets of violence in a way that white fat femme bodies do not.

The body positive stance of being unapologetic is reframed from primarily being about undermining repressive body ideals and manifesting self-love to a struggle for certain bodies to have the right to exist. I suggest that by addressing racism, sexism and fatphobia and by taking the stance of being unapologetic, they contest the dehumanising and racist construction of the black (fat) femme body.

By illuminating and challenging white privilege, they become 'killjoys' (Ahmed 2010), disturbing the (white) (naïve) body positive fantasy of 'all bodies' as 'good bodies', thus pointing towards a possible expansion, redefinition and 'repoliticising' of body positivity and its ostensible acknowledgement of 'difference'. And possibly also pointing towards a feminist future beyond white supremacy.

## Notes

1. Kinzel, Lesley. 2016. Falling Out of Fatshion: How I Lost My Appetite for Writing About Fat Politics. *Lesely was here*. 2 February 2016, <http://www.lesleykinzel.com/>
2. I regard the blogs to be public material and the bloggers as authors. <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/v>.
3. All citations from Swedish media are translated by the author.
4. Leah Vernon, *The Beauty and the Muse*. <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
5. Stephanie Yeboah, *Nerd about Town*. <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
6. Leah Vernon, *The Beauty and the Muse*. <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
7. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Why You Don't Always Need to Stick to Your Clothing Size', *Nerd about Town*, 4 January 2019, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>

8. Leah Vernon, 'Instagram Trolls: Body Shaming and Beyond', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 11 January 2019, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
9. Leah Vernon, 'Instagram Trolls: Body Shaming and Beyond', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 11 January 2019, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
10. Leah Vernon, 'Why Eating in Public has Empowered me', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 30 October 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
11. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Black Fat Women Matter too', *Nerd about Town*, 6 August 2017, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
12. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Black Fat Women Matter too', *Nerd about Town*, 6 August 2017, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
13. Leah Vernon, 'The Deletion of the Perfect Hijabi', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 4 March 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
14. Leah Vernon, 'The Deletion of the Perfect Hijabi', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 4 March 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
15. Leah Vernon, 'The Deletion of the Perfect Hijabi', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 4 March 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
16. Leah Vernon, 'Body Positivity. All Bodies are Good Bodies', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 4 May 2016, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
17. Leah Vernon, 'Why Eating in Public has Empowered me', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 30 October 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
18. Stephanie, Yeboah, 'Preaching and Practicing', *Nerd About Town*, 21 October 2018, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
19. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Preaching and Practicing', *Nerd About Town*, 21 October 2018, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
20. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Embracing me', *Nerd About Town*, 29 May 2018, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
21. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Body positivity=stop showing off your body', *Nerd about Town*, 3 October 2017, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
22. Stephanie, Yeboah, 'Body positivity=stop showing off your body', *Nerd about Town*, 3 October 2017, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
23. Stephanie, Yeboah, 'Body positivity=stop showing off your body', *Nerd about Town*, 3 October 2017, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
24. Stephanie Yeboah, 'I got the Juice', *Nerd About Town* 19 January 2019, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
25. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Plus Size Dating', *Nerd About Town*, 22 February 2019, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
26. Leah Vernon, 'The Unconventional: Thriving As A Covered Model', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 27 November 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>

27. Leah Vernon, 'The Unconventional: Thriving As A Covered Model', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 27 November 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
28. Leah Vernon, 'The Unconventional: Thriving As A Covered Model', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 27 November 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
29. Leah Vernon, 'The Unconventional: Thriving As A Covered Model', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 27 November 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
30. Leah Vernon, '#The Body Project Trailer', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 26 June 2017, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
31. Vogue, or vogueing, is a highly stylised, modern house dance that evolved out of the [Harlem ballroom scene](#) of the 1960s.
32. Stephanie Yeboah, '11 years', *Nerd About Town*, 1 February 2019, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
33. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Being Unapologetic Can Be Hard', *Nerd About Town*, 14 June 2018, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
34. Stephanie Yeboah, 'Black fat women matter too', *Nerd About Town*, 6 August 2018, <https://www.nerdabouttown.com/>
35. Leah Vernon, 'I'm not Sorry. Actually I'm Unapologetic', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 4 May 2018, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
36. Leah Vernon, 'Muslim Girl Dance#Body Project', *The Beauty and the Muse*, 8 September 2017, <https://www.beautyandthemuse.net>
37. I use 'hir' and 'ze' as pronouns since the author does not define herself as a cis-gender person.

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