

‘Turning On The Lights’ & Disrupting Inspirational Weight Loss Narratives: Analyzing
Systemic Fatphobia & Neoliberal Constructs of Health

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Introduction (I)

Why is the weight loss narrative so pervasive? How or why has western diet culture become increasingly culturally insidious? Systemically, fatphobia flourishes in western society due to “cultural fantasies of thin supremacy” (Mollow, 2015, p. 204). Women, in particular, have been continuously bombarded with hegemonic beauty and body size standards over the decades. Mainstream mass media representations have constantly “glamoriz[ed]” thinness (Bordo 1993, p.103). This has regulated visual ‘standards’ for women who are coerced into ‘believing’ these standards of beauty and body size are natural and hierarchically more valuable than bodies deemed ‘other,’ such as the ‘fat¹’ body. In doing so, the diet and fitness industries profit from fatphobic beauty standards, and this makes women predominant recipients of sexualizing and objectifying gazes.

Before I discuss the main case study undergirding this research paper, it is important to briefly situate myself in the context of this work, and discuss motivations for writing this research paper on this topic. I am a cisgender, white-passing, ‘fat’ woman, who identifies with critical feminist fat studies work on ‘fat’ embodiments and identities. I initially wanted to pursue a research project about the aestheticization of curviness in plus size modelling, but found myself wanting to do more research on what has affected me on epistemological levels, that is, how fatphobia has affected my views on my own body (as well as ‘others’), beauty, and health, as well as the connotations between thinness and healthiness. It is important to critically reflect upon

¹This major research paper will be using the term ‘fat’ in single quotations marks throughout this paper, and the intention to do this is for multiple reasons. Firstly, by using the term ‘fat,’ I acknowledge the discursive and constructive nature of the ‘fat’ body as well as ‘fatness.’ Secondly, it is an attempt to reclaim the term ‘fat,’ as both a descriptor and adjective when referring directly the ‘fat’ body. Lastly, I want to ensure that because the term ‘fat’ is complex, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the term/adjective given the context of this research paper.

constructs of fatness precisely because it affects ‘fat’ people, as well as the general population who may or may not share ‘popular’ opinions about the ‘fat’ body as a moral failure. Although this research paper will be unable to address the consequences of fat shaming, Fikkan & Rothblum (2012) argue, like many fat activists and writers have, that ‘fat’ people face higher amounts of weight-based discrimination concerning their access to health services, the medical system, and employment. When limited representation is given to ‘fat’ bodies in mainstream media, it reaffirms thin supremacist preferences for bodies that conform to hegemonic ideals of beauty and body size. By doing so, discourses of ‘fatness’ are controlled by dominant conceptualizations: ‘fat’ bodies are seen as lazy, as ‘disgusting,’ and as lacking ‘control.’ This research paper seeks to demonstrate, by analyzing two case studies of *Weight Watchers* advertisements, that ‘fat’ issues are feminist issues. This research paper will discuss how exploiting and reaffirming fatphobia through discourses of healthism and responsabilization reduce individuals to their body size. Companies like *Weight Watchers* exploit the alarming amount of fat hatred in western society, and commercialize on the benefits of ‘losing weight,’ time and again. Even though *Weight Watchers* does advertise their program for ‘all’ people, they spend a significant amount of time highlighting women’s experiences with their program, and often feature women in advertisements (that will later be discussed in the case studies section of this research paper) that reinforce negative stereotypes about ‘fatness.’

Furthermore, since this research paper is a critical response to two particular *Weight Watchers* commercials that each exemplify a growing exploitation of ‘empowerment’ discourses embedded in inspirational weight loss narratives, I will briefly address the reasons why I chose these two advertisements. The two *Weight Watchers* commercials that will be analyzed are the following: ‘See Yourself In A New Light’ and ‘Awaken Your Incredible.’ These commercials

are uniquely ‘different’ from weight loss commercials that *explicitly* create desirable ‘after,’ images of weight loss, while at the same time highlighting the negative attributes given to being ‘fat.’ The ‘fat’ person before weight loss is often displayed after the fact of having gone through some major transformation period, and one can see their ‘progress,’ to ‘slimming’ down to a happier and healthier self (Morgan 2011; Brown 2014). While *Weight Watchers* sensationalizes and emphasizes an *individual’s* capacity for change, it is careful not to depict ‘fat’ bodies necessarily as a moral failure. Yet these commercials reinforce a restrictive diet culture, and mark the attainment of health as a natural preoccupation. I am interested in critiquing the sexist and sizeist body and beauty standards embedded in covert fat shaming tactics by *Weight Watchers*, especially in consideration of the gendering nature of ‘fatness.’ Before I outline what is included in this research paper, it is important to briefly situate and contextualize *Weight Watchers*, and its company ‘values.’

Weight Watchers was founded in the “early 1960s,” with a “how best to lose weight” mentality (‘How We Started,’ 2017). *Weight Watchers* states that they have helped “millions” of people to “lose weight” and lead “healthier lives” over the decades (Ibid). They publicly pride themselves on having a “50 year” history of not only “helping people lose weight” but also base their programs on “science” and not “trends” (Ibid). People ‘interested’ in *Weight Watchers* can sign up for programs depending on their ‘needs.’ Individuals can attend (unlimited) meetings and have access to personal coaches; they can also follow a plan online and have 24/7 access chat support (‘Weight Watchers,’ 2017). They have more ‘choices,’ for individuals, and each person has the right to ‘choose’ what will ‘work’ for them (Ibid). They emphasize the ‘freedom’ to “enjoy foods” in a way that “support [the] goals” of the client (Ibid), and offer constant “support” along the way because, as they argue, “weight loss can be tricky” (Ibid). Although

Weight Watchers has advertised their programs and company values differently throughout the years they have been in business, this major research paper will be focusing on the advertisements mentioned, which intend to disseminate information about their ‘empowering’ brand. Each commercial will be analyzed (through a media analysis) to explore the ways in which messages of responsabilization and alleged ‘empowerment,’ reinforce fatphobic and healthist attitudes towards body size. I complement the use of a critical fat feminist studies approach with an analysis of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality through which individual citizens are expected to take care of their health. A critical fat feminist perspective allows us to analyze how ‘fatness,’ is dominantly represented in western media, and in particular, how weight loss narratives reinforce fatphobia and healthism, and how ‘fat’ bodies are governed by diet industry’s interest in exploiting western cultural preferences for thinness and institutionalized norms about health.

In the literature review section I will firstly address how neoliberal forms of governmentality not only promote self-governance, but “governing at a distance” structures of control (Bell & Green, 2016, p.240). The literature review also addresses academic scholarship in critical fat studies (as well as interdisciplinary fields which address issues relating to the ‘fat’ body). Critically examining media representations can help us to theorize about the gendering of ‘fat(ness).’ This theoretical framework incorporates insights from fat studies and the critical study of healthism and neoliberalism to study *Weight Watchers* advertisements. An interlocking analysis of critical feminist studies with a feminist media analysis (in order to conceptualize, question, and challenge representations of the ‘fat’ body), will assist in understanding how particular forms of representation (when repeated) or reiterated, present messages which reinforce fatphobia and healthism. After these sections, the case studies will be introduced. The

‘See Yourself In A New Light’ commercial at *Weight Watchers*, as well as the ‘Awaken Your Incredible’ commercial introduce *Weight Watchers* as a program for explicit ‘weight loss’ to potential clients. This research paper will then conclude with final remarks.

Literature Review (II)

Neoliberalism, Governance, & Healthism

The term ‘neoliberalism’ has been conceptualized vastly across disciplines, and depending on the context that it is being discussed, its meaning takes shape according to the perspective. Ward and England (2007) have a useful outline for understanding neoliberalism in the context of the social sciences, and they argue: “neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project...as policy and programme... as state form... and as governmentality.” (as cited in Bell & Green, 2016, p.240). This major research paper will be applying neoliberalism as a form of governmentality to the case study in order to critically unpack the ways in which bodies are “govern[ed] at a distance” (Bell & Green, 2016, p.240), and in turn, are responsabilized in a health-centric culture that “encourages the individual to take responsibility” for themselves (Bell & Green). As Larner (2000) argues, the project to see oneself as “individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own wellbeing” (p.13) will be reflexively included in this section and this research paper, as well as an inclusion of how healthism has been reinforced in western society’s constant “preoccupation with health” (Ayo, 2012, p.100). In this context, what is healthism?

Healthism, a term coined by Robert Crawford in the 1980s, refers to “the moralization of health,” which impacts the ways in which how one not only views themselves, but also how western culture defines ‘unhealthiness’ (Crawford, 2006, p.410). The rise of the “individualization of health” has heightened the (moral) responsabilization for the self and for the body in terms of its representational power. What one ‘sees’ when they see a body considered to be ‘outside’ of constructions of healthiness (for instance, the ‘fat’ body)? As Saguy (2013) notes, healthism perpetuates the “moral imperative to be healthy and to pursue health” (as cited in

Mollow, 2015, p.206), and has a danger of creating health-based “hierarchies” of who or whom is more ‘valuable’ based on their ‘X’ healthy pursuits (Ibid). In this case, although health itself is a complex matter, the vision of ‘healthiness’ or optimizing of individual health, depending on the ways in which government, or fitness and diet industries reinforce messages about ‘getting fit’ or getting ‘healthier,’ can create an exclusive image of what is supposed to embody a healthy ‘weight’ or body size. Therefore, as a crucial element to this major research paper, it is important to discuss in this context, relevant fat feminist thought and critical fat studies which theorize about the ‘fat’ body in the context of science and medicine, education, health, and popular culture discourse. Why is it then important to acknowledge the cultural obsession with ‘healthy’ and ‘fit’ bodies?

The diet and fitness industries consistently profit on the “pursuit of healthiness” and “health consciousness” so deeply “engrained within [the] social fabric” of the western world (Ayo, 2012, p.100). *Weight Watchers*, the multi-million dollar company that will be the main case study in this research paper, actively reflects how “healthism and neoliberalism mutually reinforce the vision of the responsible, entrepreneurial citizen,” which will be later discussed (Ayo, 2012, p.100). Contextually, neoliberal constructs of health reinforce “common sense” logics about health (Springer, 2012, p.138). Individuals in western culture conceptualize ‘health’ and the pursuit of healthiness as normal and natural because of gradual, as Crawford (2006) argues, fixation on the individual’s ability to take responsibility for their health (to minimize disease, in particular). Neoliberalized governmentality, which emphasizes “personal choice, and the freedom to choose...” and the ‘power’ to engage in the “corporatization and commodification of health” is widely accepted as empowering (Ayo, 2012, p.102-103). Power (2016) argues that the dichotomization of choices divides ‘good’ and ‘bad’ choices as moral

categorizations. The discourses of ‘good’ choices, meaning those “virtuous consumer choices” (Power, 2016, p.57), masks an “ideology of healthism” (Power, 2016, p.54). Depending on the context of what is or who is being ‘blamed’ for the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ choices one makes in their society regarding their food and exercise ‘habits.’ Rather than seeing these health discourses as enforcing hegemonic body norms and ideals; wherein the ‘thin’ body is effectively valued over the ‘fat’ body, one is encouraged to see the ‘self’ as ‘choosing’ to “regulate” themselves for their sake and for the “best interest of the sake” (Ayo, 2012, p.100). It is precisely because western culture is in the “midst of a moral panic about fat bodies,” (Power, 2016, p.43), that this “panic around fatness” itself (LeBesco, 2011, p.154), make it so bodies “...matter because of what they are and what they will become, rather than what they may reveal about intended actions” (Evans, 2010, p.22). Therefore, when dominant health discourses appeal to “neoliberal rationalities” they continue to appeal to the individualization and responsabilization of health (Ayo, 2012, p.103).

Healthism, as deeply interconnected to neoliberal governmentality, flourishes in western society because of systemic fatphobia. Cooper (2010) describes fatphobia as “the fear and hatred of fatness and fat people” (p.5). The oppressive nature of sizeism exists because of a growing “health valuing culture” which conflates thinness with healthiness (Crawford, 2006, p.402). Although there has not been definitive research done in medical journals that state that body size always and/or necessarily correlates to ‘poor’ health, popular mainstream media has represented the ‘fat’ body as the antithesis of what has been consistently characterized as healthiness: lean, thin, or slender bodies (Saguy & Almeling 2008; Farrell 2011).

Neoliberal constructs of health (i.e. ‘blaming’ and ‘shaming’ labelled ‘abject’ bodies) in western culture continues to medicalize ‘fat’ bodies under the “common assumption... that

health must be achieved” because of the emphasis on the “personal responsibility for health” (Crawford, 2006, p.402). Regardless of one’s status of ‘health,’ it is presumed that firstly, one must be engaging in good ‘healthy’ dietary and fitness habits by avoiding ‘bad’ habits such as eating processed food (Guthman 2009a). This, as Guthman (2009a) draws attention to, is once again, the “social and economic project” of neoliberalism” which increases personal responsibility onto its citizens (p.187). Individuals whose bodies are ‘read’ as not maximizing pursuits of healthiness are perceived as being at ‘fault’ for their ‘fatness’ and are constructed as being lazy (Kirkland, 2008, p.401). These authors, among others, have extensively connected neoliberal constructs of health with societal hatred for the ‘fat’ body. A critical fat feminist perspective on the “consumerist frenzy” involved in “lifestyle discourse” of diet and fitness industries (Ayo, 2012, p.101) will be examined now.

Critical Fat (Feminist) Studies

Some feminists have argued that the idealization of thinness in western mainstream media has led to the valorization of diet and fitness industries which capitalize on patriarchal beauty standards (Wolf 1991; Bordo 1993; McRobbie 2011; Murray 2008b). I will be discussing some of the major works in fat feminist studies and interdisciplinary fields which critically examine and discuss gender and fatness, in order to understand how body ideals have been reinforced in a contemporary western context. However, before I begin my review of the literature of the feminist work specifically referring to the representation of (‘fat’) women’s bodies, I think it is important to briefly discuss in detail how the ‘fat’ body has been socially and culturally constructed in the western world.

‘Fat’ bodies (and extensively speaking, ‘fatness’) has been researched in academic scholarship over the last several decades, which have studied (and study) ongoing anti-fat attitudes. In the western world, ‘fat’ people have and do face workplace discrimination, are seen as being at fault for their fatness, and are depicted negatively: as lacking self-control, as being lazy, morally inferior, unclean, and unintelligent (Kristen 2002; Puhl and Brownell 2003; Brownell et al 2005; Kirkland 2008; Farrell 2011; Fikkan & Rothblum 2012). There is extensive literature in scientific disciplines that focus on how the fat body is medicalized (Carroll, Kuczmarski & Johnson 2008; Casazza et al 2013). There are also authors who have debunked ‘obesity’ myths (Campos 2004; Cogan & Ernsberger 1999; Gard & Wright 2005; Lyons 2009), as well as those who have advocated for fat rights, discussed fat activism, and have criticized stigmatizations of ‘fat’ bodies (Kirkland 2008; Kwan 2009; Kirkland 2009; Mollow 2015). Disciplinary and multi/interdisciplinary fields have engaged in the topic of fatness from diverse perspectives relating to education, science, health, and popular culture. For the purpose of this major research paper, there will be a focus on the gendering aspects of fatphobia, which are not necessarily (or contextually always) ‘visible’ in *Weight Watchers* advertisements, but are implied or represented through neoliberal logics and constructs of health and ‘healthiness.’ Representation in these advertisements will be key to understanding the ways in which ‘fat’ remains a feminist issue. When ‘fatness,’ is viewed as a moral failure, or when weight loss industries continue to capitalize and profit on the connotations of healthiness with thinness, systemic fatphobia and healthism are therefore an important (fat) feminist issue one must be critical of. Especially when it concerns the mental, emotional, physical, and overall health of ‘fat’ people’s lives. Furthermore, since women face greater social surveillance of their bodies, especially those bodies are deemed to be ‘fat’ (Farrell 2011; LeBesco 2004; Murray 2008a;

Tischner 2013). Moreover, critical analyses of beauty standards must reflect on relevant white (and western) supremacist constructions of beauty and body size. For the purpose of this research paper, I will focus on gender to keep this scope as narrow as possible.

Critical fat feminists and fat activists, in particular, argue that structures of misogyny and sexism inherently intersect with body sizeism, and that systems of fatphobia and fat stigma in western society is oppressive (Braziel & LeBesco 2001; LeBesco 2004, Murray 2008a; Cooper 2010; Farrell 2011; Tovar 2012; Rothblum 2012; Pausé 2014). In particular, in Amy Erdman Farrell's (2011) work on *Fat Shame*, Farrell argues that one must take a sociohistorical glance at the ways in which fatness has been portrayed from the mid-nineteenth century to a contemporary American context. Farrell (2011) argues that the war on 'fat' is actually a war on 'fat' people, and she does thorough research to dismantle the "diet industrial complex" (p.14). Farrell (2011) argues that diet culture, which ultimately keeps people dieting instead of actually seeking health, is a major factor in contemporary disdain for 'excess' (i.e. 'fatness') (p.139). Farrell (2011) argues that social attitudes towards 'fat' bodies has changed over time, since the meaning of fatness depends on the context, and that it is important to reflexively remind her readers that 'fat' bodies have historically been tied to wealth. This, as LeBesco (2004) writes, is further complicated by geography and cross-cultural constructions of the 'fat' body. Farrell (2011) uses interlocking analyses on the 'fat' body, and includes dimensions of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender. She uses primary sources in her text to deconstruct the ways in which twentieth century cartoonists would feature racist and sexist images that would, in turn, reinforce prejudices towards 'fat' and racialized bodies. The inherent fatphobia in medical discourses as Farrell (2011) argues, de-"civilize[s]" 'fat' citizens, and constructs 'fat' bodies as not having the right to dignity and respect, just as their thin counterparts (p.81). This has continued

contemporarily, as Saguy and Almeling (2008) argue in their article on media representations of ‘obesity,’ that the media has been partly responsible for sensationalizing depictions of the ‘perils’ of fatness.

Saguy and Almeling (2008) discuss how various scientific studies on ‘obesity’ from JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association) between 1999 and 2003 are “translate[d]” (p.55) by news media, which then “inform” the public (p.59). Overwhelmingly, throughout a 4 year period of making ‘obesity’ visible, the news media, as these authors note, have increasingly “blame[d]” individuals (i.e. individual choices) for their ‘obesity,’ and have rarely given news media coverage to the “systemic” issues relating to health and the body, with the exception of talking about the “food industry” (p.59). As Saguy and Almeling (2008) state, the lack of diversity and perspectives on ‘obesity’ have contributed to, and perpetuated “alarmist” mentalities about the ‘obesity epidemic’ (p.59). Fat feminist studies on the moral inferiority of ‘fatness’ (LeBesco 2011; Murray 2008a; Murray 2008b; Farrell 2011) have complicated the negative discourses associated with ‘fatness,’ in order to disrupt the ‘panic’ towards ‘fatness.’ The dominant discourse which normalizes the statement, ‘fat equals unhealthy,’ saturates mainstream news media, which has created a problematic language that “selective[ly]” pays attention to ‘fat’ bodies in medicalizing ways (p.64). Saguy and Almeling (2008) argue, in this case, that news media is responsible for “moraliz[ing] weight above and beyond the science” and that they have “‘thrown fat into the fire’ by enflaming the issue of obesity” (p.67). That is why, as many fat studies scholars have and will argue, it is important to study these dominant discourses “critical[ly],” in order to “expand the understanding of fatness beyond the narrow confines of medicalization or pathology” (Cooper, 2010, p.2).

Fat studies includes, as Charlotte Cooper (2010) argues, “an extensive history and interdisciplinary literature which questions and problematizes traditional understanding of obesity...” (p.1). Fat studies “enables the reframing of the problem of obesity, where it is not the fat body that is at issue, but the cultural production of fatphobia” (Ibid). To use a critical fat studies framework, as Cooper (2010) argues, is to address (new) and ongoing complexities of how the body, ‘fatness,’ and weight intersect with multiple experiences. Cooper (2010) argues that this “diversity” in study can offer a “new kind of interdisciplinary lens” (p.10). In terms of the ongoing interdisciplinary contributions to fat studies scholarship and fat feminist thought, Kathleen LeBesco and Samantha Murray’s texts have majorly contributed.

‘Fat’ Women & Dominant Representations: Cultural Productions of Fatphobia

Murray (2008b) explores fatness, women’s experiences with fatphobia, and dominant ‘obesity’ discourses in *The ‘Fat’ Female Body*. Murray (2008b) argues that because of the dominant cultural imaginary that views “obesity” as morally inferior, diseased, and aesthetically displeasing that it is “crucial for fat people to see themselves reflected in art” and to see their bodies and “struggles and...beauty” (p.1). She states that when one “stop[s] mindlessly consuming culture and begin[s] to actively participate in it, [one] crafts and changes [one’s] reality” (Ibid). Murray (2008b) advocates for an entire re-imagination of ‘fatness,’ and to critically reflect about dominant representations and ideas about ‘fatness.’ In particular, how ‘fat’ women (and ‘fat’ people) are seen as “devian[t],” and how this notion itself continues to “pervade accounts of fatness,” as dominant “humanist liberal logic of individual responsibility” pertaining to health (Murray, 2008b, p.3). Murray (2008b) understands the ambiguities of living in a fatphobic culture: she understands that while “understanding” that her body is symbolic of

“abject lack of control” her life has been “mapped by control” (p. 4). By living in a western culture that effectively perpetuates healthism and disdain for the ‘fat’ body, knowing that “fat is offensive to the society” that one lives in, as Murray (2008b) emphatically puts, one’s life and “daily rituals” become ridden with hiding and concealing one’s body and appetite (p.5). Murray (2008b) refers to this as “resist[ing] [the] flesh” (Ibid).

Critical fat feminist studies is useful for understanding the implications and impacts of living in a culture invested in diet culture and preferences for thinness. The ‘fat’ person that is actively affected by images which degrade fatness, are also impacted by “discourses” that do shape one’s understanding of their body (Murray, 2008b, p.110). When ‘fat’ has been constructed as always already “abjected,” one must critically remember that ‘fat’ is therefore never thought of in a “neutral” way (Murray, 2008b, p.109). Therefore, as Murray (2008a) argues, “fat people’s bodies are presumed to tell of their failure to understand, take seriously, or commit to ‘common sense’ principles for health and normalcy” (p.221). As ‘fat’ bodies continue to ‘represent’ their visible failure to “accept responsibility for oneself” (Murray, 2008a, p. 215) it is crucial to critically analyze organizations that continue to reinforce the weight loss narrative, which utilizes fat hatred for the almost or already ‘fat’ body that *will* be transformed by weight loss (Brown 2014; Morgan 2011).

Kathleen LeBesco (2004), like Samantha Murray (Murray 2008a; Murray 2008b) also argues that ‘fat’ bodies have been traditionally excluded from mainstream social constructions of what is and who can be deemed attractive, desirable, and ‘healthy.’ LeBesco (2004) argues that “fat bodies are ‘revolting’ in both senses of that word: rebellious bodies and disgusting bodies” (i-ii). LeBesco (2004) investigates the “politics of fat identity” (p.13) and “fat resignification” in her text (p.17) in order to “initiate” a different “theorization of fatness” by “resist[ing] dominant

discursive constructions of fatness while opening new (and playful) sites for reconstructing fat bodies” (Ibid). LeBesco (2004) investigates what “regulate[s] and constrain[s] the signification of fat bodies” in her text (p.20), and does so by firstly tracing cross-cultural conceptions of ‘fatness,’ and then critically analyzing western dominant ‘framing’ of the ‘fat’ body as “ugly, unclean, repulsive...” in her recurrent chapters (LeBesco, 2004, p.23).

LeBesco (2011) has also argued that western culture has created a “panic about fatness,” and that “anti-fat anxiety” has and continues to systematically inform the creation and maintenance of politics, policies, and attitudes towards the ‘obese’ body (p.154). LeBesco argues that the “healthy body has come to signify the morally worthy citizen” (Ibid), which reiterates neoliberal constructs of health, and carries governmentality and responsabilization onto citizens. LeBesco (2011) pervasively addresses the various issues with conceptualizing “health as a responsibility,” and not a constitutional “right” to access care (p.156). She poses important questions about the legitimacy of claiming that ‘fat’ bodies are a ‘burden’ to the state, and further investigates the “shift[ing]” of responsibility of the “‘problem’ of obesity” onto individuals (p.159). The production of neoliberalized ‘knowledge,’ regarding the morality of health (Crawford 2006, Ayo 2012, Bell & Green 2016, Murray 2008a), is indefinitely evident in cases where governments, policy makers, politicians, physicians, for instance, reduce ‘healthiness’ to not a combination of factors, but that of “choices” one makes regarding diet and fitness (LeBesco 2011). The problem for fat studies scholars, for feminists, and for critical fat feminist scholarship is to, as LeBesco (2011) argues, not only to think of ‘fat’ bodies more “neutrally” but to “decentre” conversations of health that solely rely on dominant fatphobic and healthist discourses, but to reimagine the ways one perceives ‘ fat bodies.’ Murray (2008a), like Kathleen LeBesco (2004) have been contributing to fat studies, which has been an emerging field of study.

A major contribution to fat studies was published in 2009, and it was entitled *The Fat Studies Reader*. This collection was edited by authors Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, of whom are notable fat studies scholars and activists in their fields. There are sections in this reader dedicated to analyses of the ‘fat’ body from multiple perspectives regarding health, education, popular culture and the media, as well as activism. This text features writing that discusses weight-based discrimination, weightism, systemic fatphobia, the moral fear associated with the ‘obesity epidemic,’ alongside deconstructionist approaches to dominant health, beauty, and diet ideals and norms. I briefly discussed Guthman’s work in this reader, and now I will turn to Giovanelli & Ostertag (2009) who utilize a media analysis for their project on prime time television programs featuring the ‘fat’ woman.’

Giovanelli & Ostertag’s (2009) deconstruct how ‘fat’ women’s bodies are dominantly portrayed on prime time television programs. For the most part, the authors expose how social constructions of the ‘fat’ body are used to reinforce damaging stereotypes about the woman’s ‘fat’ body. Dominant representations of ‘fat’ women, in lieu of mainstream mass media which valorizes thin bodies, continues to support fat hatred. In particular, a culture where women’s fat bodies exist as the “antithesis of what it means to be appropriately feminine” or who are not ‘curvy’ in the right places (p.290). Since, as these authors remind the reader, because of the risk of shame and rejection for not adhering to beauty ideals in a “panoptical” society is high (Ibid). For women, who may reject those beauty standards to varying degrees, are still bombarded with and reminded of a ‘preferred’ look or style. Women are constantly reminded of what they should look like, under societal and male gazes, and this conceptualization will be relevant in understanding how and why (and majorly) the reasons why companies like *Weight Watchers* capitalize on ‘weight loss’ as embodying an image of a ‘better, newer, and improved’ self.

Giovanelli & Ostertag (2009) conclude that the ‘fat’ women featured in the cast of these programs are symbolically “annihilate[ed]” (p.294). These ‘fat’ women are portrayed as undesirable, or are denied their “sexuality” and are at times “romantically humiliated” in front of “millions of viewers each week” (p.293). This is, as Young (2005) argues, a result of the “fear of fatness and the promotion that thinness [is] desirable, successful, and attainable...” (p.249). Symbolic annihilation in this context means that the ‘quantity’ of images one sees of ‘fat’ women can usually mean that stereotypes are the focus of her embodiment or ‘role’ on the program. A unique, diverse ‘fat’ body is majorly non-existent in popular television programs. There is little to no diversity, multi-representational quality images of the ‘fat’ woman in these popular mainstream television programs to make the abundant amount of stereotypes seem less ‘stigmatizing.’ Giovanelli & Ostertag (2009) also importantly note that the woman’s ‘fat’ body in these programs is usually used to “prop” up the image of thinness in other ‘slender’ women on the program in order to uphold thin supremacist ideals (p.294). Gullage (2014) best exemplifies this argument in her media analysis of ‘Fat Monica’ on the television series, *Friends*.

Interlocking a Media Analysis In Critical Fat Feminist Studies

Analyzing media representations of ‘fat’ women’s bodies, as Giovanelli & Ostertag (2009) argue, is important because it displays cultural attitudes towards ‘fat’ women. Gullage (2014) argues that Monica’s ‘fat’ body (from the television show *Friends*) is “premised on the understanding that her body is deviant or outside the norm” (p.183). This program not only consistently refers to Monica’s ‘past’ as a ‘fat’ person, but equally spends time “exploit[ing] her otherness” (Gullage, 2014, p.183). In this sense, the “narrative use of fatness reinforces notions of normative gender roles, on which women are expected to strive for the idealized physical

form” (Gullage, 2014, p.183). In this context, a media analysis is useful for understanding the ways in which fatness, and in particular, women’s ‘fat’ bodies, have been negatively constructed in western mainstream mass media (Wilson 2005; Gingras 2005; Press 2011; Hood 2005; Young 2005; Brown 2005). It is important to understand how and why dominant images (i.e. the weight loss narrative) continue to perpetuate problematic notions about women’s bodies, and their ‘fatness.’

A media analysis, which will be conducted by utilizing a fat feminist studies lens (which is informed by understanding neoliberal values of governance), will convey the ways in which ‘fat’ women (and extensively speaking, women) are continually targeted and encouraged by diet and fitness industries to govern their bodies (Coleman 2010; Lockford 1996; Heyes 2006; Murray 2008b). The responsabilizing tactics, which will be later examined in the case studies of this major research paper, reveal how consumerist notions of ‘seeking health,’ are reinforced by patriarchal beauty standards specifically aimed at reiterating values of ‘appearance’ in a thin supremacist culture. Systemic fatphobia is maintained in western culture when the weight loss narrative is continually naturalized and idealized. Fat hatred will continue to exist (and whether explicitly or implicitly) in place of newer, more exploitative messages by companies like *Weight Watchers*, which will be later examined. Now I turn to the reasons as to why a media analysis will be used to critically examine and reflect upon representations of (‘fat’) women’s bodies in relation to neoliberal values of governmentality.

A media analysis seeks to look at the media with a “critical eye” (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p.264). Since “feminist media analysis begins with discourse” I will be analyzing how “power operates through ideas and representations” (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p.265). That is, how dominant images of weight loss are often conflated with happier, ‘healthier,’ and therefore

‘morally rectified’ bodies that rid or ‘fix’ their fatness. On the “surface [when] some types of knowledges and meanings might appear ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ in their construction and thus goes without question,” there must be further feminist interrogation about how and why these kinds of images are damaging to ‘fat’ bodies (p.266). This ‘successful’ bodily oppression is done by industries which “bombard” individuals with “the equation that thin equals beauty, will power, and success, and fat equals failure, gluttony, and ill-health” (Wilson, 2005, p.252). This is evidently seen in the media and projects (like in *Weight Watchers* campaigning) which “consistently project negative attributes onto the fat body” (Ibid). That is why it is important to assess and critically examine even the “subtleties of fat prejudice” that can “creep into” one’s daily life (Gingras, 2005, p.256). In this context, it is important to add that “fat prejudice seems to be the last ‘acceptable’ form of oppression in [this] society,” and is undeniably important to critically reflect upon in research studies about anti-fat attitudes and fat hatred (Gingras, 2005, p.256). As fat studies scholars analyze popular media’s under-representation, misrepresentation, or ‘representation’ of the ‘fat’ body, or as feminists advocate for all bodies to be free from oppression, this must and should include that ways in which fatphobia is continually normalized in western culture.

In relation to analyzing the power of discourse, McIntosh & Cuklanz (2014) argue that a “basic tenet” in feminist media studies is that “mainstream mass media function[s] through the dissemination, repetition, and support of central ideas that are accepted by the culture in which the medium under examination is produced” (p.267). A media analysis therefore is one method that can be utilized to reflect and critically examine “messages available in [one’s] cultural environment” (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p.268-69). This will be a critical reflexive point in this major research paper because feminist media studies questions “media narratives” and their

“influence, and cultural and societal importance” (Press, 2011, p.111). A media analysis can thus address the “media representations of and the impact upon women, gender, and sexuality” (Press, 2011, p.107), and it can also convey an “understanding [of] a moment in popular culture” (Lumby, 2011, p.98). This, as Steeves (1987) argues is important because one must be aware of the “presence of absence, stereotyping, and devaluation of women...” in the media (p.101). Therefore, that is why a critical fat feminist studies lens interlocks with the intended media analysis in this research paper. It interrelates to the representations of women’s (fat) bodies, and is interconnected with the focus on the ways in which information, as well as images of women’s bodies in particular are depicted consistently in mainstream fitness and diet industry advertisements. The kinds of ‘expected’ imagery that appears in the ‘weight loss narrative’ are important to reflect upon given the immense sexism embedded in fatphobia. In particular, how (‘fat’) women are targeted relentlessly for needing to either improve, or radically change their appearance to suit a healthcentric culture’s notions of ‘healthiness,’ or a heteropatriarchal culture fixated on hegemonic femininity. All of which reduces ‘beauty’ to that of a particular construct of desirability (often, in the form of able-bodied, white, heterosexual, thin, tall, and cisgender conceptualizations).

Moorti & Ross (2005) further add that feminist media studies is important because there are plenty of critical analyses in popular culture needed in order to reveal the “ongoing struggle to change the dominant association of thinness with beauty” as well as to health (p.237). Especially considering the importance of “addressing the effects of the media on women’s body image” and to acknowledge that women, as most people in the western world do, receive information about what is healthy “largely through the media” (Hood, 2005, p.239). Hood (2005) notes that it is important to ask: “how do we know what we claim to know” and to

acknowledge that some of this information is “derived from some sort of media” (p.239). It is important to question productions of knowledge, while at the same time critically reflecting about the ways in which these ‘knowledges’ are normalized by government, organizations, and industries: all of which have investments and capitalistic ‘interests’ in maintaining dominant discourses about body size and health. Neoliberal constructs of health therefore play a significant part in naturalizing ‘individual responsibility’ and personal choice to engage in what ‘benefits’ the self. It is, as Brown (2005) notes, “unfair” to “fat women” who are continually “judge[d] and penalize[d]” by society (p.247). Calling attention to the impact of living in an “increasingly visual, capitalistic culture” (Brown, 2005, p.248) is important. In order to subvert, as Murray (2008a) argues, dominant negative representations of the ‘fat’ body. This includes challenging the inherent healthism evident in fatphobic campaigning done by companies like *Weight Watchers*.

Theoretical Framework (III)

This research paper draws on critical fat feminist literature to guide the media analysis of two *Weight Watchers* advertisements. My intention is to see how *weight loss* is being marketed primarily towards women, and to critique the healthism and fatphobia embedded in the inspirational weight loss narrative. This critique is important for understanding how the image of a ‘fat’ woman is reduced to thin supremacist notions of happiness, healthiness, and beauty. The representation of ‘fat’ women’s bodies and experiences matter precisely because if the weight loss narrative is one of the dominant representations of ‘fat’ body, that is problematic. If ‘fat’ or ‘fatness’ as an experience cannot be seen outside of the weight loss narrative, and if western mainstream media does not uplift and share the multiple complexities of ‘fat’ narratives, and if ‘fat’ positivity is not valued or valorized to the extent that thinness is, then one must be critical of fat stigma and fatphobia, and the ways in which discourses of healthism ‘justify’ fat hatred. When implicit fatphobia is used to validate *Weight Watchers* messages of body positivity and confidence, we should interrogate the ways in which the institutionalization of diet culture reinforces fears of fatness. Mainstream mass media actively disseminates health norms and fatphobia by reaffirming cultural contempt for fatness. It is precisely how ‘fatness’ is viewed systemically that makes an analysis of the weight loss narrative important because if ‘fatness’ is being implicitly presented as never an acceptable body size, then the conflation of ‘fatness’ with disdain will remain a dominant narrative in western media. It is equally important to be critical of seemingly ‘positive,’ and empowering images presented by *Weight Watchers*.

A critical fat feminist studies lens allows us to reveal, analyze, and question the ways in which weight loss narratives reinforce fat shaming. I am interested in how ‘bodies’ are made responsible through diet culture in contemporary society. In particular, how ‘physical’ health is

depicted as a focal concern for ‘citizens’ and their overall ‘well-being’ (LeBesco 2011, Evans 2010, Guthman 2009b). The *weight loss narrative* is particularly important when discussing the ways in which fatphobia is normalized in western society. How does the *responsibilization* of health reaffirm beauty and body norms when individuals seek commercialized and commodified constructions of ‘health imperatives’? When weight loss is conflated with one’s healthiness, happiness, and beauty, it is important to reflexively analyze who or what is fundamentally responsible for these dominant discourses. When diet culture is reinforced by systemic fat hatred, the diet industrial complex (Farrell 2011) keeps people fixated on dieting within capitalistic mentalities of consumption and fighting off ‘fat’ excess. It is critical to analyze those very industries profiting on firstly, the normalization and moralization of ‘health,’ and secondly, the ways in which ‘healthiness’ is supposed to be ‘pursued.’ When anti-fatness is expressed through discourses of healthism, fatphobia is rendered ‘natural.’ When patriarchal beauty norms are used to exploit and coerce women into purchasing products which ‘improve’ their beauty or ‘fix’ their fatness, it is important for us to analyze the ways in which anti-fatness and fatphobia are used to reinforce oppressive body and beauty standards.

Case Studies (IV)

“See Yourself In A New Light,” is an Australian *Weight Watchers* advertisement. It was released in October 2016, and initially received mixed reviews about its ‘message.’ For the most part, *Weight Watchers*’ ‘sex positive’ approach to weight loss in this campaign received positive and negative backlash for its attempt to get ‘women’ to become more body positive and comfortable with their bodies when engaging in sexual intercourse. On the other hand, ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ was created by Australian *Weight Watchers* marketers in January 2014 as a way to engage the ‘journeying’ into weight loss in ways that appeal to individuals who are constructed as already doing ‘incredible’ things in their life (“Awaken Your Incredible,” 2014). Previously I stated the reason as to why I selected these two advertisements, and I will briefly reiterate here why these two were chosen. I will then outline this section of the research paper.

‘Awaken Your Incredible’ and ‘See Yourself In A New Light’ share similar characteristics, but their messages about ‘weight loss’ differ in terms of *Weight Watchers* intended marketing strategies, of which I will later discuss. What is ‘unique,’ about these two advertisements is precisely how they diverge from *explicit* and ‘stereotypical’ fatphobic and obvious healthist discourses embedded in the weight loss narrative (Brown 2014; Morgan 2011). The images present in these two *Weight Watchers* commercials focus on women’s subjectivity and stories without directly presenting the physical ‘fat’ body as something to be ashamed of. In ‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ one hears their ‘voices’ on issues of bodily dissatisfaction as personal and not political (for instance, the result of ‘feeling hatred’ for ‘fatness’ because of systemic fatphobia). In ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ one sees young and older women *overcoming* daily and lifetime obstacles. In both advertisements, women are empowered by personal choices which ‘turn on’ their bodily confidence, or have the potential to ‘awaken’ their ‘thinner’ selves. I am interested in analyzing and critiquing how these advertisements still capitalize on health

norms and diet culture, despite the fact that these images seemingly present ‘positive’ images of commercialized weight loss. I will be arguing that these advertisements are interconnected in terms of how *Weight Watchers* productively reinforces neoliberal values of choice, responsibility, and governance. I now turn to how I will discuss and analyze these cases.

Firstly, I will be using a media analysis to critique the advertisement ‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ Drawing on the theoretical discussion that anchors this research paper, I will define the *weight loss narrative* that circulated this advertisement. I will reflect on the messages in ‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ and think critically about its messages as it concerns discourses of empowerment, healthism, fatphobia, as well as responsabilization. Second, I turn to ‘Awaken Your Incredible.’ I analyze how the inspirational weight loss narrative in this advertisement is implicitly fatphobic, and reinforces healthism in the context of valuing thinness over ‘fatness.’ I will discuss how diet culture shape’s most women’s lives, and critique health norms in relation to preoccupations with thinness. I will analyze when and where dieting is normalized and moralized in western media, and end this section by discussing the perils of dieting, and neoliberal constructs of health in relation to cultural attitudes towards ‘fat’ bodies. I will also discuss the ways in which ‘dieting’ and weight loss is marketed towards women, who are implicitly told to accept responsibility for their bodies under the guise of agency and empowerment. To ‘lose weight,’ *only* because a thin supremacist culture values thinness over ‘fatness.’

At first glance, the ‘See Yourself In A New Light’ advertisement appears to reinforce stereotypes of fatness. The currently enlightened ‘fat’ woman is depicted as being previously dissatisfied with her body and with her ‘lack’ of sexual drive until she pursues weight loss. I argue that this advertisement reaffirms fatphobic and sizeist attitudes towards ‘bodies’ that do not conform to what western mainstream culture deems as sexually ‘desirable.’ By using a

“critical eye,” towards these *Weight Watchers* advertisements, I want to reveal how the ‘weight loss’ narrative responsabilizes individuals for their health and ‘looks’ (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p.264), even though this is presented in an empowering frame. In these specific *Weight Watchers* advertisements weight loss narratives are more nuanced, yet the focus on women becoming more sexually and physically confident about their bodies, reaffirms gendered norms and expectations for women. McIntosh & Cuklanz (2014) argue that since “feminist media analysis begins with discourse” I will therefore be analyzing how “power operates through ideas and representations,” and this includes the ways in which the women in these advertisements are being represented through the power of the weight loss narrative (p.265). In this context, what is the productive power of the weight loss narrative, and why it is so widely celebrated?

The Biggest Loser, Supersize versus Superskinny, Extreme Weight Loss, Heavy, Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian, amongst many weight loss programs or television series in the western world reveal a fascination with the struggle and transformation period of the ‘fat’ person. Some of these programs mainly depict the ‘depressed’ or otherwise dissatisfied ‘fat’ person who wants to change their body in order to improve or increase their healthiness, happiness, attractiveness, or a combination of aesthetic and physical, psychological, and emotional reasons. LeBesco (2011) argues that although ‘seeking health’ is not the culprit, it is the ways in which health (and diet culture) has become a moralizing and centralizing element in one’s life (p.160). The weight loss narrative, according to Brown (2014), can be defined as something that is “rehearsed in a magazine or video confessional online...” and features “central arguments” which “remain the same: “a miserable fat person engages in a weight loss effort and, if successful, emerges thinner, stronger both mentally and physically, and therefore ready to enjoy social advantages never previously experienced” (p.64). In ‘See Yourself In A New Light,’

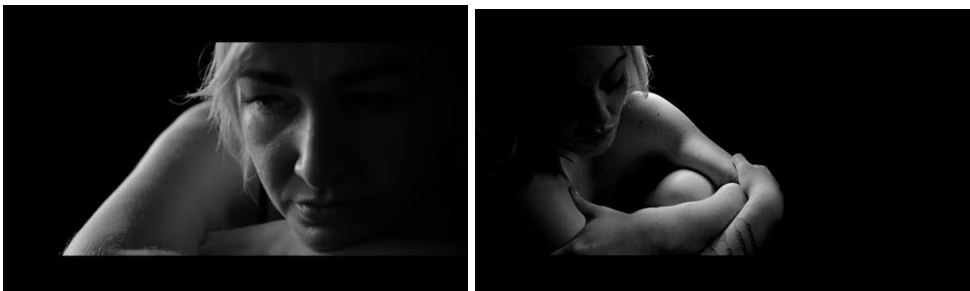
the language and tone used in this short advertisement depicts women who are dissatisfied with their bodies, and then become visibly happier (and more sexually satisfied) after weight loss. This kind of framework, as Brown (2014) suggests, conforms to expectations of what the weight loss narrative entails. However, in ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ the lack of explicit and implicit mention of weight loss, which is absent until the closing credits of the advertisement serves as a reminder to the audience that one’s own weight loss journey, regardless of one’s own personal ‘age’ in life, always exists. This will be further examined after ‘See Yourself In A New Light.’

‘See Yourself In A New Light’ & Representation of Women’s Bodies

At the beginning of ‘See Yourself In A New Light²,’ several white women appear ‘downcast.’ The video is shot in black and white. Each of them immediately appear holding their bodies either tightly to their chest while sitting down, or are attempting to take up less space on the screen by restricting their movements. They appear to be visibly upset as the camera scans the flesh of their skin. Each woman has a voice-over for herself in this advertisement, and for the next one minute, the audience is able to ‘hear’ their narrative about their past discomfort with their bodies to the narrative build-up of their newly gained ‘confidence’ upon the reveal that they are ‘WW’ (*Weight Watcher*) members. During this time, the music in the background reflects the ‘mood’ of the participants. At first, the piano playing in the video advertisement is sullen, moving ever so slightly as the women ‘reveal’ their insecurities, and the music reaches a crescendo when the women’s movement becomes suggestively freer as they reveal how much ‘sex’ they have, or how comfortable they are at being who they are (which is assumed to be, at this point, a post-*Weight Watcher* body). In this context, as Steeves (1987) argues, it is important

² Received from: <http://www.smh.com.au/video/video-life-and-style/video-beauty/ww-black-see-yourself-in-a-new-light-20161019-4m205.html> (advertisement link)

to be aware of the “presence of absence, stereotyping, and devaluation of women...” in the media (p.101). Through a media analysis of this imagery presented up until this point, women are continually being valued for their appearances, and they are being uplifted by organizations like *Weight Watchers* for conforming to certain standardizations of healthiness, happiness, and body size (thinness). Pursuing commercialized weight loss programs as a result of living in a thin supremacist culture that valorizes weight loss does expose the ways in which ‘fat’ women are treated negatively in western society. How ‘she’ will not be beautiful, sexually attractive, or have a sex life if she is ‘fat.’ In order to understand how fat hatred operates, one must view this as a “power[ful] systemic structure” (Morgan, 2011, p.190). To view the ‘promises’ of ‘weight loss,’ when marketed towards predominantly women, as problematic when they usually include notions of “empowerment... becoming normal...” and re-gaining the “discovery of her ‘real self.’” (Ibid). The images below reflect two of the personal narratives shared in this advertisement: some of these women experiencing body image ‘dissatisfaction,’ felt hindered by their lack of ‘sexual’ confidence because they hated their bodies.



They had to ‘assimilate’ to socially acceptable body and gender norms about feeling, firstly, insecure about their bodies, and secondly, having the determination to ‘change’ a body that does not ‘fit’ with thin, idealized beauty norms (LeBesco 2004; Murray 2008b; Fikkan & Rothblum 2012; Gullage 2014; Jutel 2005). The first woman reveals, “we never had sex completely naked because I could [not] stand the thought of him seeing all of me” (“See

Yourself In A New Light,” 2016). She reveals, in this case, the “miserable” feelings she has had towards her sexual relationship with her partner because of her discomfort with her body (Brown, 2014, p.64). Another participant in the video adds “My insecurities were through the roof,” (Ibid). As Brown (2014) points out, this depicts the stereotypical before’ accounts of one’s body before ‘weight loss’ emancipates the self from repressive feelings about one’s body being a barrier to happiness or, in this case, sexual fulfillment. She, like the other women portrayed in this video, are transformed by *Weight Watchers*’ sentiment of life beginning after losing weight, or in this case, becoming sexually empowered. Some women therefore may become ‘persuaded’ by diet culture’s promise that “working on the self” (Heyes, 2006, p.126) is both natural and fulfilling. While on the surface it may seem as though the ‘confessional’ nature of these women’s stories is not perpetuating body negativity, it is still(re)producing “some types knowledges and meanings [that] might appear ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ in their construction and thus goes without question,” (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p.266). By validating and then ‘fixing’ their initial hatred and disgust for the ‘fat’ body or ‘excess fat’ on the body, they are presented as not accepting their unhappy ‘fat’ selves, until they later ‘accept’ their bodies after entering *Weight Watchers*. This kind of representation can be damaging to ‘fat’ bodies when it continues to perpetuate fatphobic messages about body size and confidence.

The women in this advertisement are self-reflective about their relationship to their body in ways that transmit ‘common sense’ understandings of their bodies (Springer 2012; Murray 2008a). Even if their stories are personalized to ‘fit’ their own unique experiences with their bodies and sexualities is a fear of ‘fatness,’ or the “disgust” in one’s body (LeBesco, 2004, i-ii). As one woman puts it, “I hated the way I look,” which strongly sends the message that because she was not satisfied with her body image, she joined *Weight Watchers* (“See Yourself In A New

Light,” 2016). Bodily satisfaction in women after exposure to mainstream mass media’s glorification of thin bodies and vilification of ‘fat’ bodies, does impact self-esteem and constructs of ‘fatness’ as being morally inferior (Murray 2008a; Lockford 1996). Making a statement like her inability to not be able to “get in the moment” for sex, because, as another woman adds “you [are] really thinking about your stomach,” reaffirms a social conditioning of internalizing fatphobia (“See Yourself In A New Light,” 2016). In this case, these women are ‘positively’ embarking to make changes for ‘themselves’ and not for ‘society,’ which hierarchically assumes that the feelings one has about their bodies are somehow always internalized and not informed by popular culture, or by mainstream western culture which prefers or values thinness.

This advertisement appeals to mainstream messages about polarizing views: the disdain for ‘fatness’ and desire for slenderness. Or, in this case, to seek sexual fulfillment through *WW* by having an increased sexual and body positive attitude towards sexual engagement. It is not implicitly stated that the ideal body is the thin body, but it implies that weight loss can be a part of one’s journey if one is seeking to ‘free’ themselves from their insecurities they began with. *WW* is still marketing weight loss to its consumers, but it has carefully packaged this with notions of empowerment. This serves to “cultivat[e]” a sense of hope in these women’s lives who overcame their disdain for their bodies in favour of re-discovering a new self through implicit weight loss (Beruchashvili, Moisio & Gentry, 2015, p.307). They are presented as having gone through a “spiritual rebirth” because “Weight Watchers learn to frame their ongoing weight loss pursuits as meaningful quests for self-improvement” (Beruchashvili, Moisio & Gentry, 2015, p.318). This, when combined with exploiting gendered double standards of dieting and body image dissatisfaction, reinforces discourses of healthism and fatphobia. In this case, it

is important to be critical of “media narratives” and their “influence, and cultural and societal importance” (Press, 2011, p.11) because it does encourage would-be dieters to view “dieting as a virtuous, selfless act rather than a narcissistic, vain pursuit of physical beauty” (Beruchashvili, Moio & Gentry, 2015, p.318). When *Weight Watchers* invites people to view themselves as empowering the self, women’s bodies particularly are still being “govern[ed] at a distance” (Bell & Green, 2016, p.240). Attaining thinness (as one of the end goals) is being conceptualized as going beyond ‘weight loss,’ because *WW* is invested in getting to renew ‘her’ self-esteem, confidence, and happiness through specifically, consumerism. A media analysis of *WW* is useful for understanding and addressing how, as Press (2011) argues, “media representations...impact...women” (p.107).

‘Gendering’ Issues of Marketed ‘Weight Loss’

This is evident in arguments surrounding the culturally inherited “weight consciousness” that sets “specific cultural expectations for women” in order to “foreground the necessity for them to attain an ‘appropriate’ body shape” (Lockford, 1996, p.291-292). The social and cultural pressures to validate diet culture and fatphobia are evident in the commentaries in this advertisement. These women speak to their insecurities about their bodies, and are later depicted as overcoming those barriers to ensure a sexually confident lifestyle. Although *Weight Watchers* is open for ‘everyone,’ as they do rarely include men as clients in their advertisements and “videos,” the “target audience is quite visible female. That *Weight Watchers* deliberately targets women is obvious” (Lockford, 1996, p.294). *WW* is capitalizing on the ‘weight consciousness,’ fatphobia, and healthism conflated in discourses about a desirable and ‘fit’ body size. Since, as Ksinan, Almenara, Vaculik (2016) report in their findings, that “in line with previous studies

which found that women generally face stronger sociocultural pressures to be thin as compared to men” the women in their study (like women elsewhere) report feeling more pressures to conform to thin body norms (p.5). By responsabilizing its’ largely ‘female’ audience to ask themselves if they can “turn on the lights,” it contradictorily implies that ‘one is good enough,’ but at the same time, if one is not satisfied with their body during sex, to ‘join *Weight Watchers*,’ as it reminds the audience at the end (‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ 2016).

By creating ‘relatable ‘narratives,’ this *WW*’s advertisement addresses a significant ‘milestone’ in a ‘woman’s’ life: childbirth. Similar to the advertisement that will be analyzed next, the ‘rite of passage,’ message that is glorified in ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ is revealed to be, in ‘See Yourself In A New Light’ as something that one woman expresses as, “after having kids, you know, everything look different, your body looks different” (‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ 2016). How they feel about their body is ‘like’ how most women will feel after they have children for instance, as one woman states. Although contextually this woman is not necessarily shaming ‘post-pregnancy’ bodies, she is illustrating the ways in which people who carry babies throughout a ten month term are expected to feel that their body is ‘wrong,’ or too ‘fat.’ In this case, the *Weight Watcher* members are “assert[ing]” that ““it’s not all right to be fat and we [are] here to help you change” (Lockford, 1996, p.302). The underlying messages here result from members “internal crisis” and later “resolution” in “attain[ing]” the “ ‘appropriate’ body and mind set to perform within the confines of cultural expectations” (Ibid).

Even if the message one interprets is that these women are liberated from believing their body is not wrong, and that their body’s shape and weight should not dictate their happiness, the intention in this advertisement is to capitalize on a panoptical gaze which reinforces thinness as the preferred body size. This woman is, after all, a *WW* member who joined on the premise, as

WW exclusively commercializes on weight loss, which is conflated with happiness and healthiness. A media analysis of the ways in which ‘fat’ is conceptualized as “deviant” and therefore “outside of the norm,” is evident in Gullage’s (2014) work on ‘Fat Monica,’ in the program *Friends* (p.183). In regards to the ways in which WW is exploiting the “otherness” of the ‘fat’ body, a “media narrative’s use of fatness” to reinforce “notions of normative gender roles, in which women are expected to strive for the idealized physical form” (Gullage, 2014, p.183) is present in ‘See Yourself In A New Light.’ Even if WW’s is attempting to empower women through its advertisement on sex positivity, it fails to go beyond invoking discourses of fatphobia and healthism. (‘Fat’) women are responsabilized to change their ‘fatness,’ because ‘fatness’ has been depicted as a moral failure and aesthetically abject. Although the act of losing weight is a complex (and ironically, personal) issue, it is still the ways in which diet culture is reaffirmed in women’s lives that put inequitable pressures on her into ‘believing’ pervasively that her body is always a work in progress, or that she should always ‘work’ on her body. These ideas, seemingly informed by feminist values of respecting ‘individual’ choices, is dangerously being marketed to a majorly women audience whose quest is not necessarily for an “ideal body” but whose “resonance” is “sold to women” on the basis of “self-care” and self-love (Heyes, 2006, p.126).

These women in ‘See Yourself In A New Light’ are quite literally transformed by being in WW. This is later evident in the video when these women reveal their new found confidence for their new outlook or body in life. As one woman reveals, “if anything I want sex more now than I ever had... 10 o’clock in the morning...” (‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ 2016).

Although having a healthy sexual relationship is not the issue here, it is important to note what ‘comes after’ weight loss. After “weight loss...the important life successes must happen is the

narrative structure is to be preserved, a narrative structure that suggests that [she], while fat was incapable of such achievements” (Brown, 2014, p.70). In this case, the women in this video who feel empowered by weight loss, have not only gained sexual empowerment, but can now pursue ‘sex’ without feeling insecure or hatred towards their bodies. In this context, it is what motivates these women (who are ‘symbols’ of the ‘success stories’ of the *WW* franchise) to lose weight. Women are encouraged to being inspired by this campaign, which is capitalizing on western mainstream media’s messages of sex and body positivity. By invoking neoliberalized notions of individuality, personal choice, and responsibility, the women in the program and women who may join *WW* are perceived as not ‘joining’ because they are ‘pressured’ into joining, but because *WW* can support them with *their* ‘goals,’ and journey’s into health. Just as Crawford (2006) argues, it is when the pursuit of healthiness has been normalized to the extent where it is not seen as a cultural expectation, but as a (positive) moral obligation. The images below are the women ‘after’ the reveal that they are *WW* members. The image of the left states, “I want sex more...” (‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ 2016), followed by the image on the right which contains the campaign slogan and message (Ibid).



Although the ‘sex positive’ message in *WW* on the surface seems to invoke ‘relatable’ stories of which multiple women, across different ages in life, it does govern women at a distance, in terms of ‘reminding’ her that she is responsible for her happiness, and that it is ‘doable’ if she wants to make those changes. The reason why this is problematic is that it denies

sex positivity for ‘fat’ women and for ‘fat’ people. *WW* is not interested in ‘fat’ sex, nor is it interested in narratives from ‘fat’ women who positively discuss their sex lives because their targeted audience is the (‘fat’) women who, are ‘unsatisfied’ with the body that one’s culture has told her to hate. The messages embedded in *WW* therefore “converge” with “discourse and practices of American neoliberalism, the rise of ‘healthism... which has shifted virtually all responsibility for ‘health management’ on the individual, the development of and ‘lifestyle’ normalization...” (Morgan, 2011, p.209). By joining *WW*, it is assumed one enters by acknowledging there will be degrees of ‘working with’ the program to suit one’s needs. Yet, it is also important to note that this takes constant (social and personal) surveillance, governance, and constant responsabilizing of the self in order to ‘succeed’ in the program(s) offered by *WW*. These women are perceived as every day, yet “heroic” women who conquer their insecurities and vulnerabilities (Morgan, 2011, p.201). How could the weight loss narrative which appeals to the “stories of women choosing to be reborn as secular saints of the disciplined flesh...” be seen as less than ‘incredible’ (Ibid)?

‘Empowerment,’ Consumerism & Responsibilization

One woman in this advertisement states, it “does [not] matter what size you are, or what you weigh at all, it [is] about whether you love yourself or not” (‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ 2016). Even though the women in this advertisement spend time expressing internalized (‘fat’) hatred towards their bodies before engaging in sex: their ‘right’ to feel comfortable and to be sexually active is premised on their ability to be sex positive and ‘sexual,’ regardless of their weight? It is not simply about loving ‘yourself’ when one analyzes *WW* as a brand which exploits sexist and sizeist body image standards for women. While acknowledging the body

shame that ‘women’ inherit from a thin supremacist culture, and initiating a way to ‘combat’ these unfair standards by invoking feel-good approaches to body positivity, I argue that reinforcing the (commercialized) weight loss narrative is a problematic way to ‘uplift’ women’s sexual confidence. Is ‘loving’ oneself (or journey towards a thin/self) a major prerequisite for sex positivity? In the case of *Weight Watchers*, the corporate ability to maintain a “‘social reflexivity;” of creating “shared values and experiences” in their brand is what makes the ‘acceptability’ of even such contradictory messages permissible (Lockford, 1996, p.303). *WW* is not directly body shaming or criticizing these women, but instead is giving them a platform to discuss their ‘struggles’ and triumphs before and after weight loss. The last woman in the advertisement asks the audience, “if you [are] feeling that you can leave the light on and that you can run across the room naked...” with the screen’s printed statement “could you leave the lights on?” (‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ 2016). Leaving the audience with the hashtag, “#LoveYourself” (Ibid). By loving oneself first, by valuing that body for its inherent worth, would *WW* be necessary? If one can leave the lights on when running across the room naked, are they somehow less ashamed of their bodies? Is *WW* ‘uplifting’ women from body hatred, and in this context, the women who report feeling (statistically) inadequate or who hate their bodies before or during sex (‘So Fat People Don’t Have Good Sex?...’ 2016)? This *WW* advertisement is exploiting an array of thin supremacist mentalities that ensure profit, and ‘uplift’ patriarchal norms while valuing hegemonic femininity. The ‘empowering’ messages embedded in ‘See Yourself In A New Lights’ puts responsibility on her for feeling not only the shame of her body, but does not ‘blame’ or deconstruct systemic fatphobia. Indeed, it is not a negative message to tell any *body* that their body, regardless of the person’s weight, is worthy and valuable. Yet, the message here is giving predominantly women ‘tools’ and logics to appeal to on the surface, a sex

and body positive message that encourages women to be more sex positive or confident with a sexual partner. From the list of “motivations” for losing weight, one major ‘reason’ is that it leads to “social acceptance.” (Brown, 2014, p.72). The white women that appear in the advertisement initially feel hindered by their body images issues, and then suddenly feel liberated by a new found discovery of self-love, which is correlated to the weight loss narrative. This produces an image of self-discovery, and personal strength in their decision to go beyond feeling insecure about their (‘fat’) or the ‘fat’ on their bodies in exchange for what they ‘deserve,’ and that is sex and body positivity.

The women featured in this advertisement speak from a position of experience, as reiterated earlier, and it is *WW*’s emphasis on the personal narrative and experience, that bring ‘light’ to issues concerning the 52% of women who “won’t have sex with the light on,” (“So Fat People Don’t Have Good Sex?” 2016). Angela McRobbie (2011) theorizes that because women’s consumer choices as linked with personal liberation, and independence, creating an image of ‘female’ empowerment as deeply embedded in making a lifestyle change is productive for getting her to ‘invest’ in products of programs that are created specifically for her, since she is targeted “relentlessly” for consumption (McRobbie, 2011, p.21). Senior marketing manager Rebecca Melville (of *WW*) states that not only does “Weight Watchers [have] a strong history of providing programs based on an inherent understanding of consumers,” but that the “research proving that this was a broader issue, we wanted to shed light on this topic and empower women to be confident in every aspects of their lives” (“Weight Watchers Launches WW Black Program,” 2016). Trying to build women’s confidence as a major marketing tool to attract new clientele is what makes this advertisement productive, while at the same time it exploits patriarchal body and beauty norms regarding one’s weight.

I suggest that beneath the guise of sex and body positivity is an undercurrent of fat hatred. This advertisement promotes neoliberal values of personal choice and the ability to individualize an issue to the extent where personal responsibility becomes tied to health and physical appearance. As healthism operates, ‘commonsensical’ logics about looking/feeling better, as well as being ‘healthy,’ is so deeply engrained in western industries which profit on the fear or moral panic surrounding fatness (LeBesco 2011; Farrell 2011; Murray 2008a). This includes an array of diet and fitness industries, which emphasize individual responsibility and ‘choice,’ as a right and positive necessity for one’s personal growth, satisfaction, and health. Similar to ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ these messages serve as inspiration templates to ‘motivate’ women into registering for *WW* because it will change *their* life. Diet culture, when “normalized” and becomes a “dominant” preoccupation in people’s lives, reveals that “being on a diet” is deemed “a constituent part of participating in an increasingly inviting and compulsory MakeOver Culture” (Morgan, 2011, p.203-204). This advertisement reproduces not what the women have to strive for in terms of ‘seeking’ health, but that if they are unsatisfied with their bodies, *WW* is here to facilitate, guide, and offer support for the ‘changes’ ahead.

The advertisement is therefore responsabilizing in the ways in which the task of change and transformation must be shouldered onto the women –rather than the broader society in which fat hatred and idealized beauty norms reside. The productive messages in this advertisement is a narrative in which women confess to feeling inadequate, and who later upon entering *WW*, confess to feeling more confident. Of course women should feel confident about their bodies and their sex lives, and promoting body and sex positivity in order to counteract rampant body and fat shaming is vital as well. But the ways in which the image of “working on [one’s] self” (Heyes, 2006, p.126) has an underlying fatphobic and healthist message, especially considering

the program is ‘inspiring’ women to take ‘control’ over their dietary habits. As Heyes (2006) argues, being “on a diet” is seen as an “acceptable way to resist some of the dynamics of fat hatred, especially if the shame paradigm of the weight-loss subject is still dominant within one’s personal social matrix” (as cited in Morgan, 2011, p.210). Campaigns like *WW* continue to reproduce and profit from diet culture, and reinforce discourses of fatphobia and healthism, as well as a romanticization of the weight loss narrative in which the ‘fat’ subject is transformed and made whole through a personal journey with weight loss. Next, I will analyze, critique, and discuss ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ which I suggest further emphasizes a culture of neoliberal values of governance, by the acceptability of being governed at a distance for the sake of social acceptance and ‘health.’

‘Awaken Your Incredible’ & The (Inspirational) Weight Loss Narrative

‘Awaken Your Incredible’³ was created at the beginning of 2014, and it was an Australian advertisement for the *WW* franchise. Similar to “See Yourself In A New Light,” this advertisement is just as momentous, and it is presented like a featured documentary which focuses on the accounts that many individuals (namely, women) who are represented as ‘every day’ women one can relate to, and not perhaps, celebrity faces or names for weight loss brands (namely, Oprah for *Weight Watchers*). In this context, although it takes a full minute and thirty seconds before the audience is aware that this is *WW* campaign, dieting and weight loss is rendered as natural and ‘normal’ part of life at any given time. As Gingras (2005) notes, one must be critical of even the “subtleties of fat prejudice” while doing a media analysis of representation (p.256). A media analysis of ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ is important because it

³ <https://vimeo.com/83997257> (advertisement link)

will allow for an “understanding” of a “moment in popular culture” (Lumby, 2011, p.98). This includes preoccupations with the weight loss narrative as well as the permissibility of weight-based discrimination in terms of the cultural preferences for weight loss and ‘potential’ thinness.

In a linear method, *WW* presents the birthing of a newborn baby to the elderly ‘golden year’ experience of individuals in life. The advertisement opens up to a new life entering into this world, with a voice over reciting, “you are incredible from minute one” (‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ 2014). After a baby is born, this image is quickly followed up by a toddler learning how to swim, and once again, the voice-over tells the audience, “you refuse to give up trying” (Ibid). From this point onward, the voice-over lists what ‘you’ have done over a lifetime. The narrator tells the audience what it was like to experience childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, and the later moments in life that come with ‘age.’ This includes broken relationships (“you fell out of love”), the courage to find love again (“and bravely back into it”), standing up against a higher authority like one’s boss (“you stood up for what you believed in”), as well as an elderly woman supporting her husband in his seemingly ‘overcoming’ an illness in a doctor’s office together (“you won unwinnable battles”) (Ibid). Some of these rites of passages include receiving a “first kiss,” as well as seeking “out adventure,” and “conquer[ing] the impossible daily” (Ibid). These inspiring images of people moving throughout life are emphasized as “your stories” at the end of this *WW* campaign, which reminds people to not forget “how incredible [they] are” (Ibid).

The women featured in this advertisement, while on different life paths, are depicted as actively engaging in life’s challenges as well as opportunities ahead. One woman is running into the ocean, another is accepting a kiss from a boy on a bridge, another is laying on her carpet in a new apartment (seemingly gaining her own independence), a woman is breastfeeding, another woman is (“conquer[ing]”) her messy kitchen, and a woman is seen supporting her husband after

one can only assume to be a traumatic health ‘scare’ experience (Ibid). The women depicted in this advertisement are, for the most part, on their ‘journey’s’ or things that the audience is experiencing, or perhaps have experienced. I argue that the entire short piece sentimentalizes ‘rites of passages’ scenes. By creating a message that does not address weight loss explicitly, the “hope” apparent in this advertisement “can be construed in religious terms such as pilgrimage, wherein dieters imagine themselves on a shared journey in search of that promise of wellness” (Beruchashvili, Moisiso & Gentry, 2015, p.309). All of the images below emphasize the ‘moments’ in life these people experience: the first image is a young girl going to school, the next image is of a young woman in her new apartment, and the last image is of an adult working woman (‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ 2014).



One sees these women going through the traumas and healing processes of life. The audience can see these women support people close to them, be liberated and changed by experiences and new freedoms. The focus in this advertisement, with the exception of an instance where one man is shown at the end when *WW* advertises the fact that this is a commercial for a weight loss brand, is about women. What she ‘overcome,’ and what she has been through or will go through. *WW* recognizes it ‘all,’ and understands that she is already ‘incredible.’ The inspirational narrative is packaged with a sensationalized motivational discourse that encourages mainly women to be attracted to the *WW* brand. Making weight loss culture and diet culture more sellable by celebrating and uplifting women in their videos (as evident in the ‘See Yourself In A New Light’) seems to be an ongoing trend that *WW* has been

capitalizing on. This is something that although it seeks to draw on the strengths of the consumer, it is doing so through ways that govern people (predominantly women) in ways that regulate ‘feelings’ and thoughts (and insecurities, as noted in ‘See Yourself In A New Light’) about one’s body image and weight. This is because, as Heyes (2006) argues, “given the intensity of the pressure to conform to beauty ideals, of fatphobia, and of false beliefs about health and weight, much is at stake that may inspire even the most cynical dieter to try another plan” (p.129). In the event of the overwhelming pressure to conform to health and body norms, this media analysis is critical to an analysis of implicit and explicit fatphobia and healthism because of the ongoing “struggle to change the dominant association of thinness to beauty” and health (Moorti & Ross, 2005, p.257). To be critical of the *weight loss narrative* when it is co-opted with notions of discovering the new self, or empowering oneself, making better ‘choices,’ and becoming ‘thinner,’ as a result of accepting that ‘fatness’ was and is ‘wrong,’ should be addressed when relating to validating and not pathologizing the complexity of ‘fat’ women’s experiences. Inspiring or cultivating hope, as Beruchashvili, Moisiu & Gentry (2015) argue, in lieu of systemic fatphobia and healthist discourses, allows for people to participate in programs like *Weight Watchers* without feeling the ‘shame’ of not fitting into a thin supremacist culture. Although *WW* emphasizes personal responsibility in individuals and their members’ lives, and encourages people to ‘transform’ themselves in order to ‘take’ care of their health and well-being, are doing so because of the naturalization of fatphobia and healthism. Especially when “dieting is equated with taking care of oneself in the face of the gendered exploitation that characterizes many women’s lives” (Heyes, 2006, p.143). In this regard, the images of women presented in ‘Awaken Your Incredible’ do seemingly *sympathize* with women.

'Gendered' Expectations, Diet Culture, Governance, & Health

When *Weight Watchers* seeks to attract consumers to “lose weight,” it is, as Coleman (2010) argues, “often understood to progress through a linear temporality that involves a gradual loss of weight” (p.266). Coleman’s (2010) work on “dieting temporalities” is critical to understanding how “agency” functions in the case of *WW* when ‘agency’ is depicted in the advertisements and their programs (p.266.). ‘Agency’ is not “seen as [being] restrict[ed] or oppress[ed]” by the institutionalization of diet industries, nor is it seen as being “imposed on women” but rather is “produced through the interaction with an interface” (Coleman, 2010, p.266). Coleman’s article focuses on *WW*’s online website and program options, and seeks to understand how people interact with *WW* and its programs. In the interplay of “multiple temporalities” around the notion that “body weight... is potential rather than planned for and measured in external and homogenous ways” (Coleman, 2010, p.266). In this context, the vision of linearity in ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ follows individual moments in life, and the stories embedded in this short clip are each unique. Women are always seen as engaging in some form of agency or taking control in life, whether they are going on ‘adventures,’ or taking the lead at work. They follow particular people’s lives at different intersections relating to their relationship to personal growth, freedom, independence, and ‘overcoming’ obstacles as personal journey narratives.

The dieting temporality is not necessarily obvious in this advertisement at first glance. It seems to be infused with notions of time not being a barrier to one’s weight loss journey. Any one, at any stage of life, particularly women in their late teens to later periods in life, have the ‘right’ to engage in a journey towards ‘wellness.’ Therefore there is value in analyzing the productive power of this advertisement, and how people think about what this advertisement

represents. *Shape* magazine for instance commended this advertisement primarily because it does not shame bodies, but instead focuses on uplifting people and saying that they have “survived greater battles and triumphs than saying no to a cupcake” (‘Weight Watchers Australia’s ‘Incredible’ New Ad,’ 2014). By validating and valuing people for who they are instead of ‘punishing’ them for what they have not done, as *Shape* magazine and similar authors write, it prepares oneself for “life goals” in the “long-term” for weight loss (Ibid). By rendering issues like fatphobia and healthism invisible in favour of inspirational and empowering images of (namely) women in advertisements for weight-loss, the messages being conveyed in ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ perpetuate claims that personal choices towards wellness are not innately ‘bad.’ This reveals, as Cramer & Steinwert (1998) argue, the “prejudice” and “stigmatization” towards fat bodies that have been and are socially ingrained (p.430). Cramer & Steinwert’s (1998) work with young children’s ant-fat biases interrelate to fat stigmatization in older adults. They argue that “the emphasis for the origin of the stigmati[zation] on the social milieu of the child. To the degree that society expresses the opinion that ‘fat is bad,’ ... should increase with age” (Cramer & Steinwert, 1998, p.434). Just as Crawford (2006) argues that health has become moralized over time, young children like those featured in the advertisement grow up in a thin supremacist culture thinking that ‘fat is wrong,’ and as (critical) fat feminist scholars such as Samantha Murray (2008a, 2008b), Amy Erdman Farrell (2011) and Kathleen LeBesco (2004, 2011) point out, ‘fatness’ is culturally imagined in derogatory ways. Cramer & Steinwert (1998) argue that in order to alleviate and eventually eradicate fatphobia and sizeism, media sources need to reflect “bodily diversity” (p.449). By capitalizing on the weight loss narrative, companies such as *WW* continue to benefit from systemic structures of fat hatred (Morgan 2011), which continually invoke ‘fatness’ as an unacceptable body size. Even if ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’

recognizes and valorizes people's tribulations in life, *WW* still reinforces systemic fatphobia which exists because of the cultural preference and acceptance of thinness, and exploits the feel-good discourse in the 'transformation' ability evident in weight loss commercials.

By emphasizing personal responsibility in ways that people think of themselves as investing in their health, and engaging with a brand that 'cares,' about their clients, people can imagine their weight as an exercise in self-care (Heyes 2006). Crawford (2006) argues, that when health discourses are moralized, diet culture is normalized in ways that are fatphobic and healthist. This is evident in the proliferation of cultural preferences for thinness in mainstream western media, as well as weight loss TV programs whose main concern for its contestants or participants on the show are their 'health.' It is not necessarily the genuine concern for one's relationship to health, it is the moralization of eating, fitness, and the combination of both. It is the assumption that 'fat' bodies are unhealthy because of their size (Murray 2008a; Murray 2008b; LeBesco 2011; Farrell 2011; Evans 2010). Although the voice-over in 'Awaken Your Incredible,' remarks on people's activities or moments in their lives, the inspirational tone of the voice over invokes the "hope" that is summoned in weight-loss promotion commercials (Beruchashvili, Moisio & Gentry, 2015, p.308). With the exception of tying an image to an event in the life of the child or woman in the sequence, isolating the image from some of the dialogue is reminiscent of the 'what comes after weight loss' mentalities (Morgan 2011; Brown 2014) present in the weight loss narrative. Some of these mentalities include: having a thin body that is valorized and idealized in western culture, pursuing romantic relationships *now* that one is 'thinner' and therefore sexually and aesthetically attractive, and/or who is now able to do activities that previously prevented one from doing them with 'excess fat,'; this includes spending time with one's children while doing recreational activities. Adopting a more "critical

eye” (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p.264) to examine the discourses presented in this short advertisement, one finds the following statements: “you refuse to give up trying,” “you survived...,” “you didn’t run from...,” “you sought out...” “you found your freedom,” “you stood up...,” “you conquered the impossible...” “you won unwinnable battles” (Awaken Your Incredible, 2014). I argue that these ‘sentiments’ which are expressed in the weight loss narrative, romanticize the ‘potential thin person.’ When images of strength, resilience, and empowerment are used to validate the weight loss narrative, ‘fat’ people are seen explicitly by what they can become. A discourse in which ‘fat’ people are encouraged to engage in an honourable battle against the ‘excess fat’ is problematic because it reinforces fat hatred.

Weight Loss Narratives: Gendered Preoccupations with ‘Health’ & Body Size

Whether or not one has an ideal body in mind, it is the promise of feeling or being or embodying wellness in ways that are culturally approved that reinforces a culture of fatphobia. As Lockford (1996) argues, “joining a weight loss organization such as *Weight Watchers* promises and may temporarily deliver freedom from the stultifying inner conflict of being overweight” (p.310). By invoking an ‘empowered’ image of women who is featured in this advertisement alongside inspiring statements, it is inviting her to feel the “fulfillment of culturally approved values for female embodiment” (Lockford, 1996, p.308). The woman can ‘join’ a space that is not shaming her ‘fat’ body, or ‘non-thin’ body, but that she as the opportunity to ‘change’ and ‘transform’ a body with which she is unsatisfied. In this case, it is interesting to see how weight loss culture and diet culture are continually normalized in ways which reaffirm a preference for thinness. The anti-fat attitude that organizations like *WW* explicitly or implicitly imply in their advertisements, do continue to maintain hierarchical

preferences for bodies which ‘fit’ into mainstream western culture’s definition of beauty, and the idea that all bodies have the capacity to ‘change’ their fatness (Ksinan, Almenara & Vaculik 2016). A body which is defined as beautiful and healthy is defined exclusively by what ‘is not,’ and what is considered ‘other’ and who is or is not worthy of ‘sympathy.’ Ksinan, Almenara & Vaculik (2016) observe that an “important source of anti-fat attitudes is the weight controllability belief,” and the belief that body weight is “fully under volitional control of an individual” (p.1). For ‘fat’ people who are more likely to be visually assessed for their ‘health’ status, “personal responsibility” in this case often “serves as a justification for prejudice” (Ibid). ‘Fat’ women, and in particular, the audience that *WW* is appealing to, are being responsabilized for their body weight, especially if it does not conform to healthist and fatist notions of well-being.

In such an instance, although these women in the advertisement in ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ are participating in an array of clichéd ‘life events,’ they are engaging with what *WW* thinks will appeal. Neoliberal values, as mentioned previously, continually govern people from a distance. *WW*, when it emphasizes personal choice and freedom prolifically on their web site and in their programs, are created to give people the ‘power’ to engage on their own terms. This commodifies health in ways that are widely accepted as being individually empowering. Especially since this advertisement seeks to focus on their ‘strengths,’ and not their alleged ‘weaknesses,’ which may include the “realization” that ‘fat’ women in particular are supposed to feel ‘guilty’ for, in “neglecting the moral duty of bodily care” (Beruchashvili, Moio & Gentry, 2015, p.315). Neoliberal constructs of health continually keep people preoccupied on responsabilizing the self. In ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ the underlying message here is to occupy people’s thoughts with their ‘potential,’ for thinness or weight loss, and to exploit the fear or disdain for ‘fatness,’ through ways which romanticize the inspirational narrative because one can

make those ‘differences.’ It is, as effective as the weight loss narrative has become, by definition a way to get people to see the potentially “fat-person-presently-dormant within-but-just waiting-as-fat laden flesh-ready-to emerge-expand-and-visibly-engulf-self-and-identity with each potato chip or serving of a sensuous non-low-fat salad dressing” (Morgan, 2011, p.198). The ‘moral’ citizen does not burden the health care system (LeBesco 2011), and they accept responsibility for their food and exercise ‘choices,’ which are usually reduced to fatphobic and healthist arguments about visual ‘assessment’ of the ‘fat’ body (Guthman 2009b). *WW* targets the “exemplar of the ideal neoliberal, socially responsible, low-risk health subject” (Morgan, 2011, p.202). Upon utilizing a media analysis (Lumby 2011; Gullage 2014; McIntosh & Cuklanz 2014; Gingras 2005; Hood 2005) for this research paper’s case studies, one can argue that because a toxic diet culture permits conflating health with body size, fatphobia and healthism are institutionalized as an acceptable form of (moral) judgement.

By ‘losing weight’ one is taking control of one’s life, and when “dieting is [seen as] attractive” precisely because it is perceived to be a lifestyle change, these structures of fat hatred, rely on maintaining systemic fatphobia (Coleman, 2010, p.280). Coleman (2010) argues that the appeal of following a *WW* plan is that one can “go at [a] pace” that suits the individual needs (p.282). In this case, ‘Awaken Your Incredible’ invites the audience to check out the culturally aware and sensitive *WW*. The company engages with their clientele in ways that make dieting “eas[ier]” and “second nature” to everyday life (Coleman, 2010, p.282). One can only hear how *WW* representatives and discourse will emphasize the diet is here because “[one] want[s] to change [one’s] life” yet, at the same time as *WW* keeps track of your progress, and lets clientele know what will or will not be effective for weight loss, it still requires the person to follow their program or ‘fail’ on their own terms (Brown, 2014, p.74). Even though the message *WW*

presents is inspiring, it still celebrates “new paradigm...the American Weight Loss subject” (Morgan, 2011, p.209) in ways that continue to reaffirm diet culture and fatphobia. That one’s worth is valuable if and when one follows a set of guidelines towards health. Michael Burgess, a *Weight Watchers* general manager in marketing has stated, “Weight Watchers is founded and built on the truth that only lasting weight loss solution for you, comes from within you” (‘Weight Watchers Launches Inspirational...’ 2014). The sentiments expressed in ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ remind the audience to take stock of all they have accomplished in life, and that their ‘battles’ or struggles within weight-loss are on a continuum. *Weight Watchers* can support, and offer individual ‘tools’ on this journey. As Heyes (2006) notes, *WW* must be seen for what it is: a company “whose primary goal is profit” (p.145).

The “normalization of dieting within everyday western culture” (Coleman, 2010, p.267) operate within a discourse of ‘choice,’ which demonstrates how power operates within neoliberal values of responsabilization while at the same time reaffirming preferences for thinness because one is ‘watching’ (or reducing) their weight. The ‘success’ of the weight loss narrative in this case is for those consuming the ‘stories.’ Those who are bearing witness to the many women in positions of reclaiming their right to feel good in a body (‘See Yourself In A New Light’) and who are confronting life’s challenges with grace and fearlessness (‘Awaken Your Incredible’). These messages, under the guise of empowerment, manifest the productive power of governmentality, and assume or expect bodies to not feel overwhelmed by diet culture, but to see this as an opportunity to makes changes. While women outside of *Weight Watchers* (who have not yet joined or who are watching this commercial) can engage and not feel governed at a distance but who are being responsabilized in relation to their thoughts about their body weight and health (Ayo 2012; Bell & Green 2016; Larner 2000; Springer 2012). Similar to *The Biggest*

Loser, Heavy, and other weight loss programs where ‘fat’ people undergo extreme weight loss or follow strict regimented diet and exercise plans, *Weight Watchers* has created narratives which can appeal to audience members by ‘empowering’ and naturalizing elements of responsabilization. To take part in *Weight Watchers* is to participate in making ‘good’ choices for oneself. As Crawford (2006) argues, the moralization of health supports mentalities that elevate the weight loss discourse. It reinforces and normalizes the moral imperative towards healthiness as both necessary for personal growth and citizenship (especially regarding access to health care, whether equitably or to be free from weight-based discrimination).

After a media analysis of these two advertisements, I would argue that ‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ and ‘Awaken Your Incredible’ function on common sense principles of neoliberalized governmentality (Ayo 2012; Bell & Green 2016). One is not only entrepreneurial regarding health pursuits (such as registering for a *Weight Watchers* program), but one is presumed to have the power to make those personal ‘choices,’ and responsibilities to make those changes for the better. “Losing weight” as Brown (2014) argues, has such “appeal” because it “depends on the widespread, shared prejudice against fat people, and the prejudice in favour of bodies with limited apparent fat” (p. 64-65). That is not to say that every person who joins *Weight Watchers* is inherently fatphobic.

Conclusion (V)

The weight loss narrative reinforces deeply engrained neoliberal values of personal responsibility, individual ‘freedoms’ and choices, as well as ‘common sense’ principles relating to the maintenance of one’s health (Larner 2000; Ayo 2012; Bell & Green 2016; LeBesco 2011; Guthman 2009b; Springer 2012). The weight loss narrative is widely accepted in western culture because of its connotations with healthiness, thinness, beauty, strength, and empowerment (Brown 2014; Young 2005; Wilson 2005; Murray 2008a; Gingras 2005). Discourses of fatphobia and healthism are embedded in western mainstream mass media’s dominant disdain for ‘fatness,’ and these systems of oppression continue to be reproduced by the diet and fitness industry’s exploitation of thin supremacist ideals. The institutionalization of ‘diet’ culture is present in brands like *Weight Watchers*, who capitalize on neoliberal constructs of health, and the cultural vilification of ‘fat’ women’s bodies.

By utilizing a critical fat feminist studies lens (which is informed by an understanding of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality), I have argued that the reasons why systemic fatphobia (extensively, fat hatred) as well as healthism is maintained is because of a cultural preference for thinness, as well as moralization, normalization, and validation of diet culture. In ‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ and ‘Awaken Your Incredible,’ the covert fatphobia and healthism embedded in its messages to ‘inspire,’ and uplift the stories of predominantly women are, as I argued, problematic representations because they “symbolically annihilate” (Giovanelli & Ostertag, 2009, p.294) the ‘fat’ woman. These advertisements, through a media analysis, render ‘fat’ (women’s) body as ‘other,’ and undesirable. In ‘See Yourself In A New Light,’ several women confess to hating their bodies before entering into *Weight Watchers*. The women admit they could not feel (sexually) comfortable or confident with themselves until it is revealed that they entered into the *Weight Watchers* program to assist in their new sexual awakening. This

kind of representation denies the diversely ('fat') lived experiences of people engaging in sexual relationships, and assumes that 'fat' is deviant and therefore needs 'fixing.' In 'Awaken Your Incredible,' *WW* is celebrating the life span of multiple women on different paths and in different moments in their lives. This advertisement capitalizes on romanticizing the weight loss 'journey,' which has come to represent the 'transformation' period of a 'fat' person's transition into 'thinness' (Morgan 2011; Beruchashvili, Moasio, & Gentry 2005; Brown 2014). 'Awaken Your Incredible,' is implicitly fatphobic and healthist because *WW* still exists as a commercialized weight loss program, which exploits gendered double standards in relation to body size and social constructs of beauty. Furthermore, 'See Yourself In A New Light,' reveals cultural contempt for the 'fat' body, and through the gendering of 'fat,' it is quite revealing of the hegemonic beauty standards associated with 'thinness.'

When 'fat' women are largely responsabilized for their 'weight' and body size it devalues their sense of self, and socially penalizes women who do not conform to thin supremacist norms (Brown 2005). By encouraging women to participate in diet culture, without appreciating the diverse representation of women's bodies and identities, it places an oppressive emphasis on appearance and heteropatriarchal values of femininity. Seeking health and participating in (ironically) individual pursuits of weight loss or health is not necessarily negative. It is the ways in which western society and mainstream mass media have cemented a socialized weight consciousness in predominantly women (Coleman 2010; Lockford 1996; Bordo 1993; Gullage 2014) which has reinforced systemic fat hatred and disdain for 'fatness' (Farrell 2011; Brown 2014; Cooper 2010; Fikkan & Rothblum 2012; Saguy & Almeling 2008), has validated and widely accepted and normalized 'inspirational' weight loss narratives in popular media, and has justified an overall preoccupation with health through fatphobic discourses. It is important to be

critical of media narratives that transmit and reaffirm societal and cultural norms regarding, in this case, 'fatness.' Representation is important because if 'fat' people are continually associated with stereotypes and prejudices, this does concern the overall well-being and lives of 'fat' people because it is the ways in which western culture permits and does not disrupt fatphobia. If cultural images of 'fatness,' do not surpass the current degrading images of the 'fat body,' which is labelled as abject, then there must be further analysis and interrogations of the ways in which western culture glamorizes and accepts the diet industry's continual perpetuation of and profit on discourses of fatphobia and healthism. 'Fatness' must be re-imagined in ways that move beyond the weight loss narrative because 'fatness,' and the experiences of being 'fat,' are multi-dimensionality. It is vital to disrupt the moralization of 'health,' conflation of thinness with healthiness, and the overall justification for fat hatred in western society. It is necessary to challenge western mainstream media's normalization of the weight loss narrative, responsabilization, as well as discourses of fatphobia and healthism, which are closely interconnected. By contesting media narratives that depict 'fatness' as a moral failure, one can begin to shift the narrative from romanticizing the 'transformative' capacity of the 'fat' body, to the ability to transform and radically subvert dominant cultural imaginaries of thin supremacy.

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