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**Fashionably Voluptuous: Normative femininity and resistant performative tactics in fatshion blogs**

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## **Fashionably Voluptuous: Normative femininity and resistant performative tactics in fatshion blogs**

### **Abstract**

While research on consumer identity projects has begun to include marginalized consumers, we nevertheless lack insight of the ways in which socio-historical understandings of gendered identity are (re)constructed in the context of consumer resistance and in relation to the market. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, we draw on Butler's notion of performative identity formation and combine this with Bourdieu's notion of capital as identity resource, first to explore performative identity construction of fatshion bloggers embedded in the normative understandings of gendered identity, of adopting and negotiating the dominant cultural discourses of fashion, and second, to consider the subversion of such discourses and resistant acts as these are enabled by normativity. We establish two performative identity tactics that highlight normativity as a resource for resistance.

### **Keywords**

Butler; identity; gender; cultural capital; consumer resistance; normativity; fatshionista blog

### **Summary statement of contribution**

This study focuses on the under-researched area of identity work of marginalized consumers by examining the gendered consumption practices of fatshion bloggers. Combining Bourdieu's notion of capital with Butler's theory of performativity we investigate how fatshionistas enact gendered identities and engage in resistance to both market forces and normative gender and body expectations. We establish two performative identity tactics that highlight normativity as a resource for resistance.

*'I am a plus-size woman. I know what it's like to feel ignored by the fashion industry. I know what it's like to compromise style and fit for what you can find in your size. I know how it feels to be told fashion isn't for you.'*<sup>3</sup>

## **Introduction**

In her theorization of gender and identity, Judith Butler (1988, 2006/1990) makes the point of how a person may become marginalized when certain norms of the dominant culture are not manifested in and by a person, and indeed in and by the body. Butler's extensive work on gender and identity has changed our understanding of the construction of gender, and guided researchers to question the limits and limitations of gender and its many manifestations. Butler's insights on the complex relationship between normativity and cultural intelligibility reveal the constructed nature of many of the categorizations that limit identity expression.

While the gendered norm for cultural intelligibility is heterosexual, many more norms dictate cultural intelligibility and acceptable personhood in the everyday lives of consumers, one being body size. In this article, we set out to study how plus-sized women, as marginalized fashion consumers, cope with the hegemonic cultural norms governing female identity positions and how they engage in subversive identity work.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://heartifb.com/2013/04/08/15-plus-size-fashion-bloggers-redefining-fashion/>

We take a Butlerian approach to resistance and see it as a series of subversively repeated performative acts (see also Eräranta, Moisander & Pesonen, 2009).

Fashion blogs have become centre stage where representations of normative femininity and beauty ideals are negotiated and challenged (e.g. Gurrieri and Cherrier, 2013; Salo, 2007; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Connell, 2013). Creative adoption of fashion discourses in consumer identity work and in consumer resistance is well documented (Thompson and Tian, 2008; Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Connell, 2013). Fatshion blogging, a neologism comprising the words ‘fat’ and ‘fashion’ (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), is a relatively new phenomenon: these blogs have sprung up as an active statement for fat-acceptance, and as such, serve as instantiations of consumer resistance of marginalized groups. The blogs illuminate marginalized consumers' identity work at the intersection of commercial culture and the counter-representations of traditional femininity. While it has been argued that consumer resistance is nevertheless guided by cultural norms and understandings (e.g. Thompson and Tian, 2008), Scaraboto and Fischer (2012) showed some of the strategies frustrated, marginal consumers in the field of fatshion use to seek a higher position in fashion markets by resisting norms on that field.

Fatshion blogs are a critical as well as a constitutive part of ‘the fatosphere’, an ambient space of peer support and active identity work where being fat is not vilified. Gurrieri & Cherrier (2013) describe the fatosphere as a network of resources that provide “a safe space where individuals can counter fat prejudice, resist misconceptions of fat, engage in communal experiences and promote positive

understandings of fat” (p. 279). While the blogs feature practices of dressing up, at the same time they display new modes of self-portrait (Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013). Fashion, including fatshion, can also be viewed as a site of political action and contestation (Connell, 2013). Thus, fatshion blogs, in addition to being fashion blogs, constitute networked, collective and active consumer resistance.

We combine Butler’s performative perspective on identity and gender with Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas of cultural and social capital. Consumption practices have been established as resources for the negotiation of consumer identity, and Bourdieu’s theories have been widely applied in consumer research (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2012; McQuarrie et al., 2012; Üstüner & Thompson, 2012; McAlexander et al., 2014; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). However, research on consumers with subordinate forms of cultural capital has remained scarce (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2012). In addition, Toril Moi (1991) notes that “one of the advantages of Bourdieu’s theory is that it not only insists on the social construction of gender, but that it permits us to grasp the immense variability of gender as a social factor” (p. 1035).

In building our theoretical perspective, we view fashion not only as a site of constant negotiation and an avenue for consumer resistance but also as an arena where identity is performed through a ‘series of performances’ (Butler 2004, 2007/1990). From this perspective, we empirically explore the ways in which the fatshionista bloggers’ identity work is constrained and/or enabled by normative frameworks, and the role of resistance, seen as a repetition of subversive performative acts, in

marginalized consumers' identity work (see also Eräranta et al., 2009). Based on a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995a, 1995b, 2003) of 12 Western fatshion blogs, we examine both the textual content on the blogs (the posts, bio information) and the visual images, for example, the poses, the positioning of the subjects, gaze, and the composition of the images (e.g. Salo, 2007).

In this article, we explore fatshion blogging as a postfeminist identity project. As Gill (2007a, 2007b) reminds us to focus on postfeminist media culture as the critical object of study, fatshion blogs provide a window to contemporary gendered practices of identity construction. We focus on the discursive practices with which fatshion bloggers construct their intersectional identities as plus-sized consumers. This study contributes to the literature on marginalized consumers' identity work and gendered consumption practices, while it also sheds light on the nature of consumer resistance and the role of normativity in resistant practices.

Body size is but one of the social, intersectional categories defining an individual. The use of 'fat' throughout the paper is a conscious choice, following the practices of the fatshion bloggers themselves. There is an element of 'coming out as a fat person' on the blogs (see Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013), which we see as an act of reappropriation of a stigmatized word, an act of owning it so as to de-stigmatize it (cf. Galinsky, Hugenberg, Groom, & Bodenhausen, 2003). Therefore, the word 'fat' is not in this article seen or intended as offensive.

## **Literature background and theoretical framework**

*Gendered identity as a performative, complex and fluid construct*

For Butler, there is no gender identity that is not performed, no essentialist gender behind the acts; rather, gender identity is performatively constructed in ‘the “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler, 2006/1990, p. 34). Inspired by Butler’s ideas of performativity and identity, we approach fatshion bloggers’ identity project from a performative perspective, viewing the acts of identity construction as discursive repetitions guided by normative beauty ideals.

As Butler talks about the performative, constructed nature of gender identity, gender being a ‘stylized repetition of acts through time’ (Butler, 1988: p. 529), she also points out how the actor (as well as audience) comes to believe in the performative accomplishment and start to perform gender ‘in the mode of belief’ (ibid.). Thus, any gender transformation must arise from these acts, by way of ‘different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style’. (Butler, 1988, p. 529). The capacity of fatshion blogging to constitute resistant action lies in different kind of repeating.

In many popular representations fat is represented as if it was a social and physical disability, a negative attribute of the body. Thus, such a negative attitude toward a fat body is not seen as arising from situated cultural expectations, resulting from a failure to comply with the norms that dictate what bodies ought to be like, but rather the fault is placed with the individual. Therefore, ‘[f]at people, in their excessive refusal to be disciplined into culturally “acceptable” body shapes and sizes, are then as corporeally deviant as those others [who are] considered [...] to be disabled’ (LeBesco,

2004, p. 74). This ‘corporeal deviance’ may, by some, be interpreted as defiance to comply with the normative order and thus, as a choice that emphasises self-control (and by some, the lack of it). LeBesco’s bodily acceptability and deviance as indicators of cultural discipline resonates with Butler’s notion of cultural intelligibility as access to personhood (2006/1990). Echoing de Beauvoir, Butler (1988) says that ‘to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of “woman”, to induce the body to become a cultural sign’ (p. 522). Gurrieri & Cherrier (2013) found that fatshionistas (re)negotiate cultural notions of beauty through different performative acts, and identified three different acts: coming out as fat, mobilising fat citizenship, and flaunting fat. While the main purpose of fashion images as commercial images is to display fashion, the other function is to present the ideal body as well as ideal behaviour, gestures, and facial expressions (Salo, 2007).

Butler (1988) also discusses gender as a ‘corporeal project’ tied to cultural survival and states that ‘those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished’ (p. 522). What follows is that individuals who fall outside the normative framework are often inflicted with mistreatment and abuse that originate from the norms; that is, by normative violence (e.g. Butler, 2006; Chambers, 2007; see also Boesten, 2010). Because in our social and cultural climate being fat is commonly viewed as a (bad) choice, it is readily vilified and fat individuals subjected to punishment, or ‘cultural discipline’ (cf. LeBesco, 2004). Thus, underneath the fatshionista project may lie the fundamental bodily experience of exclusion and marginalization.



Feminist scholars have long paid attention to the link between gendered experiences and other social categories, such as class, race, age or sexuality (Gill, 2007b), that is, intersectionality. Different social categories as sources of inequality have been explored from a gender perspective at least since the 1970s (Yuval-Davis, 2007), but since the 1990s, intersectionality has secured a significant position in feminist theory as a theoretical, methodological and conceptual perspective (Gunnarsson, 2011). Intersectionality is considered to be one of the most significant contributions to the theoretical development of understanding gender in feminist research (Shields, 2008).

The basic tenet of intersectionality is that an individual is never merely a woman, white, or working class; she is all of those all at the same time, in addition to belonging to numerous other social categories (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Gunnarsson, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 1993; 2006; 2007.) Intersectional theory allows us to examine the multiple ways in which the different social categories that form our identity take part in the identity forming processes. These processes can be examined by way of analysing discourses (Ferree, 2009). With the help of intersectional theory it is easier to understand why fatshionistas experience being defined solely due to their body size, even though it is but one of many features that are all intertwined, influencing each other as well as having a strong impact on the contemporary understandings of gender as a social category.

*Cultural and social capital as consumer identity resources*

In building our theoretical framework, we combine Butler's (2004; 2006/1990) notion of gender performativity with Bourdieu's ideas of cultural and social capital: we see cultural capital as a resource for negotiating consumer identity. Bourdieu (1986) argues that capital falls into three different categories: economic, cultural, and social capital. Cultural and social capital can be used as a form of symbolic power to distinguish oneself from groups deemed below oneself and to identify with a group above oneself. Social capital can be used to produce or gain other capital, for example, cultural.

Taking up networked action in the fatosphere is a way of accruing capital. As Fuchs (2014) remarks about the nature and function of social media, '[u]sers employ social media because they strive for a certain degree to achieve [...] social capital (the accumulation of social relations), cultural capital (the accumulation of qualification, education, knowledge) and symbolic capital (the accumulation of reputation)' (p.115). Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) explains that '[s]ocial capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (p. 119). Thus, by blogging, fatshionistas become producers of new forms of cultural capital, thereby creating a stronger collective position for themselves.

Bourdieu's cultural capital has been used to explain consumers' aesthetic taste and consumption choices (Arsel & Bean 2013; McQuarrie et al., 2012). Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2012), for example, show how cultural capital, gained by making particular consumption choices, has been used to legitimate a subordinate position.

However, due to limitations in capital, access to fashion often proves more challenging to marginalized groups (Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013; LeBesco, 2004).

Arsel & Bean (2013) define a taste regime ‘as a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates the aesthetics of practice in a culture of consumption’ (p. 900), usually articulated by institutional authority. Fatshion bloggers can be seen as searching for a place in a taste regime by way of different discursive practices. As consumption is generally influenced by individuals’ socioeconomic history (Allen 2002; Askegaard, Arnould, & Kjeldgaard 2005), marginalized consumers are positioned as disadvantaged not only relative to available material resources due to limited market offering, but also regarding cultural and social resources. Therefore, seeking a place in the taste regime purported by the mainstream fashion market may prove difficult to consumers in a marginalized position. To change consumer positioning, one would need the knowledge of how to acquire or produce relevant forms of capital (and to recognize these in the first place), but also how to employ them as resources for new identity position.

This is not to say that marginalized groups are disadvantaged in all the ways: rather, occupying a marginalized position also provides the othered subject a broader cultural perspective (Rollock, 2012). This position may benefit the consumer subject by offering access to divergent discourses and practices to draw from. However, in order to gain acceptance, marginalized groups still need to show affiliation with privileged groups (e.g. Huovinen, 2013, p. 200); here, ‘repeating differently’ offers an opportunity for resistance by way of affiliation. Viewing identity as a series of

performances will help us conceptualise the identity construction of marginalized consumers more comprehensibly when we see cultural capital as serving as a resource for identity performances. Performative practices are also acts of doing. Arsel and Bean (2013) emphasise the aspect of *doing* when it comes to taste; fatshionistas, in the repetition of different performative acts of identity, are also doing taste, as taste is converted to practice.

Displays of good taste and cultural knowledge of fashion are vital in the identity construction of a group usually marginalized in the realm of fashion (see also McQuarrie et al., 2012). Fashion blogs generally have been seen as a new way to reach a mass audience and to gain and share both cultural and symbolic capital (McQuarrie et al., 2012) but more importantly, online spaces provide an opportunity for ‘former fashion “outsiders” to participate in the production of fashion discourse’ (Connell, 2013) and offer a way out of marginal consumer position. The fatshionista community in the fatosphere shares a strong sense of collective identity that they build also via photo sharing (e.g. Tiidenberg, 2014).

Fashion can be ‘both a key medium and a marker of a new habitus’ (Sandikci and Ger, 2010, p. 32). The view that consumers construct their identities through consumption (e.g. Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) is prevalent in consumer research, yet this has also been questioned (Halton & Rumbo, 2007; Schouten, 1991; Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013). Halton and Rumbo (2007) claim that although consumption affords a myriad of expression for the construction of identity, these are nothing more than

‘permutations of [...] the *consumer-incorporated self*, a self compromised by marketing ideology’ (p. 298).

Fashion becomes a site of struggle (see also Connell, 2013) as opposing representations meet: the fatshionista bloggers ‘opt in’ by entering an arena that culturally already operates in the feminine space, yet which also traditionally purports very limited female ideals. As Gurrieri & Cherrier (2013) observe, the ‘categorical distinctions between beautiful and ugly bodies are normativities constructed and maintained by the marketisation of beauty’ (p. 292). Taking height as an example of the categories relating to the body and identity, Valtonen (2013) reminds us of the significance of body and gender in the formation of consumer identity and agency. Indeed, Halton and Rumbo (2007) claim that ‘[e]ach consumer, as a *self*, represents a site of contestation over the very definition of his/her selfhood’ (p. 297). In this light, fatshion blogging presents as a form of embodied resistance, where the body mediates the juxtaposition of traditional and alternative fashion discourses and practices of self-presentation when resisting outside the market is no real alternative.

Thompson and Tian (2008) note that consumers often fall victim to the hegemonic cultural representations that continue to shape the oppositional representations produced by marginalized consumer groups. This view shares with Halton and Rumbo (2007) the understanding that consumption choices, also purposefully adopted consumption practices (including countercultural or resistant practices), are ultimately embedded in a larger web of market-dictated ideologies. These ideological underpinnings together with cultural and social understandings that

guide much of consumption nevertheless enable transformative identity work and, indeed, resistance. While hegemonic representations have been said to shape resistance (e.g. Thompson and Tian, 2008), we contend that when adopted by marginalized consumers they not only guide resistant practices but have the potential to come to constitute resistance, particularly in identity projects. Thus, utilizing hegemonic representations in performative acts in subversive ways may in itself be a form of resistance. As sites of resistance, fatshion blogs provide a forum for counter representations of gender and femininity.

*Fatshion blogging as a postfeminist identity project*

Fashion has always been part and parcel of what it means to belong to the social elite (Almond, 2013). With their critical stance, however, fatshion blogs represent the contemporary postfeminist media culture. Rather than an analytical perspective, Gill defines postfeminism as a *postfeminist sensibility* (Gill, 2007a; 2007b). Informed by constructionist and postmodernist approaches, postfeminism aims to ‘examine what is distinctive about contemporary articulations of gender in the media’ (Gill, 2007b, p. 148). An obsession with the body is one of the characteristics of the postfeminist media culture where femininity is seen as a property of the body (Gill, 2007b).

Fatshion bloggers’ identity construction is very much a project of the body and the reasons for this are twofold: first, the site of their identity work is the body, the object its size and acceptance of these on both a personal as well as societal level; second, representations of fashion traditionally are corporeal and convey

representations of the ideal body (e.g. Salo, 2007). Gurrieri and Cherrier (2013) see the fatshionista identity as one that ‘has emerged from the worldwide fat activism movement as a challenge to the stereotype that fat cannot be fashionable or attractive’ (p. 279). Thus, fat fashion images, and more importantly the courage to display one’s body in the fatshion blogs, are important aspects of the performative identity construction of the fatshionistas. Fatshionistas turn the focus on the self and body around: the object is not to change the fat body, but to flaunt it (see also Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013).

Traditionally, feminism criticizes placing woman as an object of gaze; postfeminism, on the other hand, sees the woman as a willing object, thereby transforming into a subject who uses her corporeality as an instrument of power. However, McRobbie (2009) points out how consumer culture ‘produces a specific kind of female subject within the realm of its address’ (p. 62) and how this serves to encourage bodily dissatisfaction. Indeed, criticism against postfeminism maintains that these changes have not, in fact, granted women more space, but rather have led to an exaggerated notion of individual responsibility and self-control familiar from the neoliberal economic theory (Gill, 2007b; 2009).

In the following sections we first present the empirical study, and then proceed to the analysis and findings to present and discuss the resistant practices fatshionista bloggers use to negotiate their consumer identity.

### **Empirical study**

*Materials*

The empirical materials of the study consist of 12 fatshion blogs. These blogs form a representative selection of active blogs belonging to what has been called the fatosphere (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). By representative, we mean that the contents (images as per poses and settings, textual information regarding the purpose of as well as motivation for the blogs) are very similar across the board in the genre of fatshion blogs. All the blogs are kept by female bloggers who describe themselves as plus-sized and interested in fashion. In all the blogs, the bloggers write about fashion and their experiences as plus-sized fashion consumers.

The authors also consulted Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest using the #fatshionista hashtag to further establish the self-representations of the fatshionistas in the social media sphere, but these were not included in the analysis. The fatshion blogs are very similar in their layout and general outlook to traditional fashion blogs: the bloggers present their fashionable attires and accessories while commenting on fashion and participating in consumer discourses around fashion and the market offering. In addition to images and texts, some blogs contain videos as well.

Readers are able to comment on the blog posts and thus participate in the creation of the blog and the space fatshion blogs inhabit in the wider blogosphere (see Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005; Herring et al., 2004). The research design of our study is data-driven: the process of analysis, which helped refine the research questions as findings began emerging from the analysis, guided the research. This kind of a research design allowed a flexible and reflective process to fully capture the



richness of qualitative data.

All the blogs in the dataset were followed for 6-12 months ranging from 2013 to 2014. The blog posts, including comments, were read and analysed over this time period, amount of posts depending on each blogger's activity. It became evident this was enough to reach the saturation point, and we were able to see common themes emerge across the blogs, but also within individual blogs. The themes that rose from the data were categorised and later formulated into findings. When relevant, sections of text as well as some visuals were printed out for a more detailed analysis. In addition to the blogs chosen for analysis, dozens of other fatshion (and also some mainstream fashion) blogs were followed to get a good overall view of the entire fashion (we include fatshion here) blogosphere and to guide the final selection of the blogs.

The 12 blogs chosen for this study represent seven Western countries - UK, US, Australia, Spain, Sweden, Denmark and Finland - and cover five different languages (English, Spanish, Swedish, Danish and Finnish). The authors are well-versed in the languages used in the blogs, and translation help has been sought when needed: also, the examples in the analysis section have been translated when necessary. If the original language of the blog is not English, it has been mentioned under the extract. The blogs have been coded numerically (for example, Extract 1. Blog\_01) to maintain the bloggers' anonymity.

### *Methods*

The methods used to analyse both the visual and textual meanings in the blogs are based on the critical discourse analytical framework (Lazar, 2007, 2008; Fairclough, 2003, 1995a, 1995b). CDA allows examining culturally diverse material critically and helps uncover underlying power positions and struggles as these are expressed at the level of language, mediating social practices and naturalized ideological positionings. We use CDA to analyse the texts (see, for example, Fairclough's (1995a, p. 106 - 109) discussion on presupposition) and examine the ideologies affecting the female ideal(s). On naturalization in and by discourses, Fairclough (1995b) states that it 'gives to particular ideological representations the status of common sense, and thereby makes them opaque, i.e. no longer visible as ideologies' (p. 42). Thin as normal is one such naturalized discourse whereby female subject position is (re)produced in discourses, against which fat is seen as an anomaly, as deviant.

Fairclough (1995b) also posits that discourse and discursive practices are seen, at the same time, as '(i) language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice' (p. 97) and that 'the link between sociocultural practice and text is mediated by discourse practice' (p. 97). Thus, using a critical discourse analytical approach to examine discourse(s) we are able to critically examine sociocultural practices. We analyse both visual and textual communication in the blogs. We adopt the position that these modes of communication act together as semiotic, communicative resources, constructing one's identity as an intertwined semiotic process.

The images on the blogs are analysed to examine what kinds of gendered representations arise. As for visual elements, the central elements of a fashion photograph include ‘garment, model, pose and décor’ (Rosenblom, 1984, p. 495, quoted in Salo, 2007, p. 111). For Salo (2007), posing – which includes *pose*, *gestures* and *expression* - closely relates to the representation of an ideal woman and ‘manifests the notions of beauty’ (p. 111). Indeed, gender representations mediated by and circulated in the media have a strong normative effect as advertising images have the capacity to shape gender identity (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998, p. 162). Salo, however, also brings up the issue of violating this ideal representation by breaking the practices of fashion images.

Focussing on the features that fall under ‘posing’ above (Salo, 2007), we examine what kind of gender representations are constructed. As for the location of the photo-shoot, Salo (2007) says the ‘setting puts fashion in its place: where it belongs, where it definitely does not belong, where you can get by wearing it’ (p. 111). We have systematically examined the blogs and in our analysis concentrated especially on the following features:

1. On visual communication, and how the images construct the identities of the bloggers: the poses and positioning, facial expressions, gaze, composition of the photos and various other elements in the fatshion images (e.g. location of photo-shoot, quality, focus).

2. On textual communication, and how the fatshion bloggers' biographical info describes them, and how in the texts the bloggers bring up size, plus-sized fatshion, evaluations relating to these and how the bloggers describe and evaluate the fashion market.
3. On identity representation as these representations emerge as a combination of the two modes of communication, the visual and the textual, and the tensions between different tactics of identity management.

Materials were analysed to investigate how fatshionistas see themselves, their identity and the wider 'fatshion cause' in relation to the surrounding societal values and norms regarding gender and size.

### **Analysis and findings: Engaging in resistance through normative practices**

Below we will present the analysis and main findings. Of the themes that emerge from the material we have distinguished four discursive practices the fatshionistas draw on in negotiating and enacting their performative identity. We will elaborate on each of these practices in turn, as well as discuss the functions of the practices and the motivations for fatshion blogging more generally. We will first present the two practices that underscore difference and diversity in relation to normative conceptions of beauty, femininity and the female gender, namely *destigmatization* of fat, and

*reappropriation* of older fashion styles and social space by demanding cultural and social visibility. We will then proceed to presenting the two practices of *communality* and *mimicry* that revolve around emphasising similarity and affiliation with the hegemonic representations. These resistant practices form two wider, superordinate categories of identity management tactics that underlie the bloggers' performative acts of identity, categorised as they relate to normative understandings of femininity as either mobilising diversity or similarity. We will next explore the resistant aspect of each practice.

*Destigmatization - proud of being fat*

Stigma is mediated by negative social categorizations, and the term 'fat' is loaded with negative connotations. What emerged as the main motivator for the fatshion blogs was rejection of stigma and promotion of acceptance of diversity. The very term, *fatshionista*, signals certain pride and an uncompromising attitude. In Butler's (2011) words, '[w]hen one freely exercises the right to be who one already is, and one *asserts a social category for the purposes of describing that mode of being*, then one is, in fact, *making freedom part of that very social category*, discursively changing the very ontology in question' (emphasis added). By 'freely', Butler means without the threat of violence, without cultural discipline. In this light, the term 'fatshionista' seems fitting: fat fashionistas, consumers who love fashion. This relabelling prioritizes body size and makes a point of it rather than hiding or obscuring it. Galinsky et al. (2003) highlight the importance of examining labels used 'both by self and by others,

because it helps to shed light on the construction, maintenance, and alteration of social identity' (p. 222). Intersectional theory sees identity as being constructed at the intersection of different social categories. As one of the most salient social categories defining fatshionistas is body size, the reappropriation of the initially derogatory term is one step toward empowerment:

‘A fatshionista is a fashionable stylish, and well put together plus size woman. She is me, she is my readers.’

(Extract 1. Blog\_12)

Reappropriation of stigmatizing labels is possible ‘because stigma is malleable and the meaning of labels is contextually sensitive’ (Galinsky et al. 2003, p. 223); furthermore, the process of reappropriation ‘can both be a cause and marker of elevated group status’ (p. 223; see also Cook & Hasmath, 2014). Thus, by coining the new term ‘fatshionista’, the bloggers come to occupy a social category they have created, and as observed by Butler, thereby claim legitimacy for their existence and make freedom part of this social category (2011). By explicitly reappropriating the term ‘fat’, fatshionistas distinguish themselves and reject demands for bodily changes. In doing so, they constitute themselves as active, empowered subjects.

*Reappropriation of space for visibility - because I'm fat*

As evidence of a growing concern regarding what ‘fat shaming’ is doing to girls and women, the blogs are a shout-out to those inflicted to resist body-related oppression and a sign that the post-feminist freedom of one's body is indeed a problematic claim.

Plus-sized consumer faces restrictions absent in the lives of the ‘normal’ sized consumers: the notion of trauma pertains to plus-sized women due to the gendered representations of women as slim and sexy, but also due to a larger societal issue of fat being vilified in our culture (LeBesco, 2004). The biographical information reveals the more explicit motivation for blogging: arising from experiences of exclusion and otherness, fatshion blogging is an attempt to both accept oneself and to become included:

I started this blog because *I* exist and because *you* exist. Because there are hundreds of thousands of girls in the world who actually look more or less like I do, or who in any case have a body that is not like the current ideal the media shows us.

I want to high five all invisible plus-size girls out there, because for sure we exist!  
(Extract 2. Blog\_05, translated from Swedish, emphasis in original)

Indicative of the deeper desire for acceptance on a more general level is the acceptance of the body; the blogger in the next example urges others to find tenderness toward oneself instead of constant shame and embarrassment:

My size is 50/52. Yep, I’m one of those chubby ones who post full-body photos of themselves. By doing this I hope to inspire other girls to *feel proud of, or at least be neutral towards, their bodies* regardless of size.

(Extract 3. Blog\_06, translated from Swedish, emphasis added)

The message of ‘being neutral toward one’s body’ shows how the transition from self loathe to self love may be a difficult journey. Loving the bigger body is somewhat absent in our culture; it is usually something to be altered, implying inherent fault, or deviance (LeBesco, 2004). Fatshion blogging is a personal journey from body hate to feeling comfortable in one’s skin:

If you follow this blog you’ll know that I am not the sort of fat blogger who presents for you the latest looks from Evans or Simply Be or tells you where all the clothes I am wearing were bought from, or which generous clothes making companies sent them to me for free. I don’t give you this info, partly because *this blog is about me not you* – here are some pictures of me in my clothes, you, meanwhile, can do what you like [.]

(Extract 4. Blog\_10, emphasis added)

Fatshionistas evaluate and criticize the existing market logics and their exclusion from the fashion market. They also take stock of how they have been treated:

If you are fat with restricted choices, living your life *in a constant hailstorm of advice about what is fucking flattering*, it is all too easy to [be] stuck in a fashion rut.

(Extract 5. Blog\_10, emphasis added)

Fat bodies are subjected to discursive and patriarchal control in and by the media, of which Giovanelli and Ostertag (2009) note that media representations serve to symbolically annihilate fat women (p. 291) by prioritizing certain representations and concealing others. As the fat body has become the object of public negotiation and scrutiny, fatshion blogging is an ostensive effort to claim ownership of one’s body. One of the blogs includes a Q&A section, and the very first sets of the Q&A set the



tone and show a determined subject who draws boundaries between the self and the other:

Q: You're not healthy, shouldn't you lose some weight?

A: *My weight & health is none of your concern*, thank you.

Q: But don't you promote obesity?

A: No, I do not promote obesity, just *acceptance of both yourself & others*.

(Extract 6. Blog\_08, emphasis added)

By explicitly setting the limits of what is personal, fatshionistas discursively construct a subjectivity that has control over their own existence.

The desire to have an impact on the market by increasing the selection of plus-sized clothes is one of the motivations for blogging (see also Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) and when successful, interpreted as an indication of inclusion, illustrated in the example below:

A step in the right direction.

Just have to write a blog post about an email I received yesterday from Lindex. It's really crazy that I get happy to get this email. It should not be a big deal. But I actually think it is the first time that a company sends out an email with a discount code that ONLY applies to their plus-size department. And the email actually contains pictures and tips on clothes in bigger sizes. This does not happen often!

(Extract 7. Blog\_06, translated from Swedish, emphasis in original)

The market dictates what counts as a bigger size: usually 'bigger sizes' are seen as starting from size 44 (European size). The power to define and construct categories

tells of the imbalanced power relationship that holds between consumers and the market.

Of all the retail segments the plus-sized market<sup>4</sup> is the one growing most rapidly lately, and the increased market offering is good news to fatshionistas:

I think it will be interesting to see how Sweden's plus-sized selection will change in the future, because it will change or disappear, that is one thing that is for sure, as other interest groups in the market have woken up and seen the plus-size market really IS the market which has increased the most lately, including money.

(Extract 8. Blog\_5, translated from Swedish, emphasis in original)

The desire to be acknowledged by the market actors adds to the complexity of identity construction. Fatshionistas engage with the platform and their respective networks because they aim to achieve social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). While this notion of capitalist reign and market driven economy may exclude the human subject, it is a precarious relationship and a problematic symbiosis exists between the two: consumers utilize the market for self-expression, yet even in their resistance they depend on it. The market, necessarily, needs the consumers, yet what the consumers want is still largely dictated by the market.

*Communality against exclusion*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://buxtonco.com/news/news-detail/retailers-wake-up-to-a-plus-size-industry-revolution>

Many fatshionistas report feelings of exclusion in and by the market. Fatshion blogging is a way of narrating oneself into the public fashion discourse. It is a way of making oneself visible (see also Connell, 2013) as much as it is a form of social action:

[This fatshion blog] has now evolved into a fashion blog in which I aim to break down the barriers on society's definition of what is beautiful, sexy, and fashionable in every post.

(Extract 9. Blog\_12)

Occupying a marginal consumer position, fatshionistas feel excluded on two accounts, by the market (see Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) as well as on a more personal level. The two realms interact; the market intrudes the personal.

[t]rying stuff on in charity shops is not like trying stuff on in other shops. I do try stuff on. I find it easier because they haven't made the clothes, so *they're not judging or excluding me if I don't fit into them*. I do sometimes find it hard going looking at my puffy flesh under bad lighting as I fail to fit that flesh into a variety of clothes I thought were my size, but I don't feel like a *non-person* because of it – just an unlucky one.

(Extract 10. Blog\_10, emphasis added)

That one would feel like a 'non-person' because of a body that defies the normative expectations is testament to embodied, gendered inequality. Butler (2004) extends justice to concern consequential decisions arising from 'what social norms must be honoured and expressed for "personhood" to become allocated [...] depending on whether or not we recognize a certain norm manifested in and by the body of that other' (p. 58). To regain personhood, fatshionistas enter the contested realm of fashion and adopt the dominant fashion discourses, thereby testing and stretching the

boundaries of traditional conceptions of feminine beauty and of the female gender. In the blogger community, they find empowerment as well as validation of their personhood - as Moi (1991) observes, the Bourdieusian perspective ‘assumes that gender is always a socially variable entity, one which carries different amounts of symbolic capital in different contexts’ (p. 1036). The fatshionista community provides such a context where working on the preconceived ideas of gender is possible, one that facilitates resistant acts of subversion.

I decided to start this blog after being a regular poster on the Fatshionista LiveJournal community. *Finding that community changed my whole outlook on life*, I was fat (still am) & unhappy with myself (not so much now). I was amazed to find *a place where fat people celebrated their bodies*, instead of being ashamed.

*My confidence grew & grew*, until I decided to start a blog so I could have my own space showcasing outfits.

(Extract 11. Blog\_08, emphasis added)

The example above also illustrates how fat bodies, in the eyes of others, are often seen as physically deviant (e.g. LeBesco, 2004) and as already noted, constructing a gender that does not comply with the norms leads to repeated instances of being punished (cf. Butler 1988), illustrated by the example below:

What get’s shouted at me isn’t ‘you please me’, it’s ‘*you displease me*’. It’s ‘*fat bitch*’.

I get *people in the street telling me I am fat*.

(Extract 12. Blog\_10, emphasis in italics added, emphasis in capitals in original)

Coming together in community acts as a source of peer support. Fatshionista bloggers often urge other plus-sized consumers to stop hiding their bodies:

Plussize women can (and *are allowed to!*) do just as much as their thinner sisters. Toss away *the rules of society*, and wear whatever makes you happy. We only have this one life, why waste it by *hiding ourselves and our bodies away?*

(Extract 13. Blog\_11, emphasis added)

The fatshionistas take an active stance against such prejudices and body normativity, urging others to ‘toss away the rules of society’. In this cause they find unity in the network whereby social capital is increased, acting as identity resource. Collective effort and a shared social identity help fight stigma, and the very idea of being explicitly visible has a therapeutic effect:

My confidence has grown tenfold over the past few years, just by posting photos of myself & showing off my outfits.

(Extract 14. Blog\_08)

Rendering cultural capital into social capital in the form of a networked, socially shared existence, blogging achieves a healing effect. Accruing social capital in communality also helps gaining new forms of cultural capital as the collective together reworks and challenges the normative order constraining them. Of the intersectional identity categories, those pertaining to the body are also potentially the most stigmatizing;

blogging provides a forum for a bodily display and a communal performance, which has a particularly empowering effect for the fatshionista community.

*Mimicking trends: this is our world, too!*

Visually, we find great parallelism between fatshion and traditional fashion blogs; for example, the images mimic the lowered gaze familiar from fashion shoots, signalling submission to the gaze of others. On the whole, positioning presents a passive subject, inactive against a carefully selected backdrop. Seeking similarity and aspiring to normativity is a way of accessing the realm of normalcy (e.g. Berlant, 2007) and social sanction. Fatshion blogs feature twisted feet, crossed legs and other advertising imagery. The contrapposto, weight on one foot, causing dangling of the arm and shoulder, is a common pose found across the blogs, also commonly found in underwear fashion shots (Salo, 2007). The gendered identity fatshionistas enact resembles fashion imagery: stereotypical, often submissive, transmitting embodied femininity. In emphasising similarity, fatshionistas position themselves closer to the marketplace ideals (see also Berlant, 2007): this strategy has the capacity to mediate resistance, but also convey and reconstruct normative ideals, thus having a double function. In the empirical materials, some blog texts feature DIY sections, for example about sewing clothes if the market does not offer the desired fashion or size. Thus, do-it-yourself can also offer a mode of resistance.

Common is also the 50s style appreciation of the voluptuous woman, with enhanced curves and ultra feminine style from high-heeled shoes to flowing skirts. This

represents the images dating back to the times when the curvy female body was celebrated. Drawing parallels of this type is a way for the marginalised to approach the position of acceptability, by adopting common discursive practices. The voluptuous bodies of the 50s are also something we are accustomed to seeing: a fuller body within the parameters of the 50s ideal does not look out of place; rather, this way the fat body manifests norms of the past, and becomes recognizable and socially sanctioned.

Orthodox conventions referring to body size can be challenged in subcultures that draw their aesthetics from history, like from the Victorian times when voluptuous bodies were celebrated (Goulding & Saren, 2013). Reappropriation of styles is indicative of using affiliation for the purposes of inclusion. By dressing, adorning and displaying the bigger body in the context of fashion discourses, by mimicking existing practices, the fatshionistas while asserting diversity turn their difference and stigma into a positive force of affiliation. Thereby the bloggers include themselves in the fashion narrative and find empowerment as legitimate subjects.

Practices such as playing with styles also shows creativity and can be seen as subversion. These practices illustrate resistance by affiliation and seeking similarity: as De Certeau (1984, p. 25) wrote about “perruques”, the everyday tactics of this kind can be seen as clever ways of turning conditions favourable to oneself. Additionally, as taking photos of oneself (or self-shooting) has been conceptualized as ‘a significant late-modern self-, and community construction practice’ (Tiidenberg, 2014), combining the subversion of fashion discourses in the images of the self works to build one’s identity as the series of performed acts unfolds on the blogs.

Poses and trends popular on social media are also reproduced on the fatshion blogs. These include the classical contrapposto pose, the so-called pigeon-toed stance, and positions such as crossing of the legs and lowering of gaze. These poses also refer to a childish, shy attitude, thus underlining the model's innocent and surrendering attitude in front of the camera's gaze.

Setting shows where fashion does, and does not, belong to (Salo, 2007). Usually, the subject is located outdoors, with carefully selected backdrops. The bloggers also display images of themselves wearing just underwear, and hence the fatshion repertoire is not limited to items that provide more cover. No extravagant posing was found, but there are playful poses that convey lightness of being and fashion as fun, a statement also repeated textually in blog posts:

It's [the blogger's] mission to bring even more fashion and on-trend design to the curvy danish women, and she hopes that her blog inspires others to be more playful and adventurous with their style. *Fashion should be fun*, and it isn't limited to sizes below a EU 42/UK14.  
(Extract 15. Blog\_11, emphasis added)

Collective action on fatshion blogs creates a community, Connell (2013) observes, 'through both the co-optation and the countering of predominant understandings of fashion and fashionability [...] achieved through the discursive disruptions with respect to the politics of size, gender, and consumerism' (p. 216).

The following image is an example of a pose typical of all fashion blogs.



- insert picture here -

*Image 1. Fatshion blogger, Plusmimmi, posing on her blog - permission for use of photo granted*

Individuals express their identities “by participating in communal photographic exchanges that mark their identity as interactive producers and consumers of culture” (Van Dijck, 2008, p. 63). The acts of subversion of visual imagery represent appropriation of cultural capital in the form of manipulated discursive practices in new contexts, and thus form an important part of the repetitive repertoire of marginalized consumers. Sharing photos is also a form of bonding (Van Dijck, 2008), and sharing photos of the self together with peer interaction can have an empowering effect (Tiidenberg, 2014).

Fatshionistas are incorporating into their resistance that which they seek, visibility and recognition. Berlant (2007) sees aspirations to normativity, and thereby to normalcy, as a route to social recognition, and thus as something marginalized individuals might strive for in order to improve their existence. To break away from a marginal position, fatshionistas are actively seeking to include the fat body in the landscape of normative female representations by mimicking the gendered and culturally acceptable discursive practices.

As motivations for fatshion blogging and the fatshionista identity project we have identified feelings of social exclusion and otherness, experiences of market exclusion, and marginalization as (fashion) consumer, but also the desire for

diversification of available female subjectivities. While some of the practices used to answer these deep-seated issues are explicitly resistant, the more implicit practices of similarity embedded in the normative framework nevertheless serve to resist the categorical exclusion of the fat subject by mobilizing the very discourses used to marginalize the plus-sized consumer. In the table below we have presented the findings and explicated the different practices and how these relate to the tactics of diversity asserting and similarity seeking.

Name of tactic, relative to normativity	Name of resistant practice	Social function	Example
DIVERSITY ASSERTING	destigmatization	diversification of female subjectivities, building self-esteem, rejecting demands for bodily change	“I took a 1,5 hour promenade in my new shorts from Monki! They are so short, so short that my thighs are visible. My thighs that rub together. Did it take courage to go out and show my fat thighs that touch each other? Nope. Not really. Why should it be difficult? I just tied my shoes and went out. It's called freedom and happiness!” Extract 16. Blog_06 (translated from Swedish)
	reappropriation	against fat shaming, fighting trauma and otherness, occupying visibility	“My confidence has grown tenfold over the past few years, just by posting photos of myself & showing off my outfits.” Extract 17. Blog_08
SIMILARITY SEEKING	communality	sociality, communal empowerment, peer support, social action against fat oppression	“If [tv-presenter] thinks that "they" don't deserve fashion, well "they" will damn well show her we do. And so was born #WeAreTheThey - 1000s of women, standing up not just to [the presenter], but to every person who has told us no, who has made us feel any thing [sic] less than worthy of everything in life.” Extract 18. Blog_07

	mimicry	resistance by affiliation, mobilizing normative discourses, inclusion as a fat female subject	I've been obsessed with winter whites lately, so a strapless peplum dress from [label] was perfect. I absolutely [sic] loved the fit of this peplum dress and how it gives the allusion of curves and hides the tummy. Peplums are still in ladies! I threw on my faux fur for a little drama and a deep wine lip. I've never been a fan of reds, but everytime I wore red it was a night to remember. Extract 19. Blog_012
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Table 1. *The resistant practices used in negotiating the fatshionista identity.*

## Discussion

In this paper, we have investigated the performative construction of gendered identities of marginalized consumers online using fatshion blogs as the forum for negotiating hegemonic fashion and gender discourses, and examined which factors are contributing to the process, either as enabling or as constraining. Based on our analysis, we have presented four performative practices through which fatshionistas resist and widen the norms of femininity too narrow for them: these are destigmatization, reappropriation, communality, and mimicry. All the practices display skilful appropriation, manipulation and negotiation of existing cultural discourses surrounding gender, fashion and the market.

In addition, we categorised these four practices into two wider, superordinate categories of identity management tactics that underlie the bloggers' performative acts of identity, defined and categorised as they relate to normative understandings of femininity. These were broadly defined as *similarity-seeking* and *diversity-asserting*

*tactics*. Interestingly, both types of tactics of identity management show complex tendencies for constituting contra-market resistance, some more overt than others. We see the practices of destigmatization and reappropriation being used to highlight an identity anchored in diversity, employed to embrace the difference and to become visible while rejecting the societal demands for bodily change: together these form the tactic of diversity asserting, as both practices revolve around the difference against the normative backdrop. On the other hand, we have the practice of communality, whereby fatshionistas blog for visibility together, and the practice of mimicry, which underlines similarity with culturally acceptable representations by mobilising normative discourses (and not least by visual means), yet subverting these in resistant ways.

While diversity asserting can be seen mainly as a challenging activity (both in terms of the market and gender and body normativity), similarity-seeking tactics proved to have the potential to act *both* as challenging *and* as sustaining. This is because by seeking similarity with the female ideal, and by mimicking the discursive practices that constitute the ideal, the fatshionistas effectively seek normalcy by blogging themselves into inclusion and into visibility within normativity, yet by way of subverting the normative discourses where they can. Having experienced social exclusion, the fatshionistas use the similarity-seeking tactic to underline the shared, also visually expressed, commonalities that link them to the mainstream fashion consumer and the idealised representation(s). However, the performative acts are repeated slightly differently and by way of this contra-market tactic of inclusion the fatshionista bloggers come to reject the market exclusion and construct themselves as

included, acceptable subjects. Both tactics, diversity asserting and similarity seeking, operate on the basis of a Butlerian subversive repetition.

Drawing on Butler's (1990) notion of resistance as 'subversive repetition', Eräranta et al. (2009) explored the subtlety of consumer resistance, showing how resisting the normalized forms of subjectivity may be subtle instead of direct opposition against the wider social order of society. Our findings support this; in particular by showing how aspirations to similarity can function as resistance, which feminist critique might at first glance interpret as mere conformity to societal pressures. Such active (re)construction of alternative cultural and historical perspectives is a form of resistance to hegemonic representations (e.g. Thompson & Tian, 2008) that fatshionistas also engage in: in constructing their own perspective fatshion bloggers become empowered members of the society as they aim to break away from a marginalized consumer position.

The study shows that the fat female body forms a complex site of resistance where not necessarily all the forms of oppression are contested. This relates not only to the acquisition and production of new forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), but also to creative negotiation of existing discourses. Adopting a performative perspective to the construction of identity and viewing identity as a series of repeated acts that draw on different capital allows us to examine the various ways in which fatshionistas repeat *differently*. Focusing on the different practices that constitute these performative acts we are better able to see how identities are constructed by these acts in a complex process of conformity and resistance. With this study, we extend the discussion of

cultural capital within consumer studies by showing how a marginalized consumer group, by skilfully mobilising normative discourses for the purposes of resistance in the form of fatshion blogging, offers new perspectives on what the ideal body is like by presenting alternatives to the traditional fashion images. Normativity can thus also be enabling (see also Berlant, 2007), not only constraining. Our findings resonate with those of Connell (2013) who found ‘inclusion and subversion’ (p. 216) to operate in a queer fatshion community blog which demands inclusion in the fashion space, yet ‘subverts the very space it seeks access to by critiquing the discourses that sustain it—exclusivity, consumerism, and conformity to hegemonic gender performance’ (p. 217).

For Berlant (2007), normativity presents as ‘an evolving and incoherent cluster of hegemonic promises about the present and future *experience of social belonging* that can be entered into in a number of ways, and that can best be tracked in terms of affective transactions’ (p. 279, emphasis added). For Coleman & Figueroa (2010), beauty as an embodied affective process presents at the same time as promising and depressing: focusing on beauty, the fatshionista project positions displays of fashion as the gateway to normalcy (see Berlant, 2007, for aspirational normalcy). The tension between seeking approval, on the one hand, and resisting the hegemonic understandings, on the other, highlights the complex nature of the fatshionista subjectivity and shows how these two desires are entangled, affecting identity work in different measures depending on the individual. We may assume that the difficulty of this dichotomy - as well as the opportunity it presents for resistance - applies to female consumers more generally when women are culturally and socially sanctioned, if not

‘punished’, into embodying certain norms and, using Butler’s (1988) words, to become the cultural sign that is intelligible to others. In this study this tension was most noticeable as a disconnect between the visual and the textual expressions of identity; we may speculate whether this is due to the fact that as children we are encouraged to argue and present our point, to state our difference, verbally rather than visually or bodily. One’s body is indeed such a visible, temporally and spatially continuous sign that to make any statement with and by it would resonate with much larger audience than a verbal expression ever could.

Relying on corporeal empowerment, fatshion blogging can be viewed as an expression of postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007a, 2007b; McRobbie, 2009). By presenting their body in social media, fatshion bloggers seek legitimation for their body and their femininity (see e.g. Tiidenberg, 2014), but also for personhood (Butler, 2006/1990). On the other hand, their experiences underline the very object of postfeminist criticism: the constant work on one’s appearance and the incessant self-control that come to define the ‘right’ kind of femininity as well as the ‘right’ kind of fashion consciousness. The blogosphere forms an affective hub of identity performances, where cultural capital is acquired and distributed. Fuchs (2014) urges us to critically assess the relationship of social, cultural, and symbolic capital with economic value production by such media, stating that ‘[t]he time that users spend on commercial social media platforms for generating social, cultural and symbolic capital is in the process of prosumer commodification transformed into economic capital’ (p. 116). The exploitation of consumer efforts and of networked sociality is another

indication of the intricate and problematic relationship between consumer subjects and the market.

Our analysis shows that normativity plays a crucial role in marginalized consumers' negotiation of identity by enabling resistance. Furthermore, we show that while resistance enables marginalized consumers' identity projects, it may also masquerade as normativity and apparent conformity. The study finds that resistance and conformity are intertwined in complicated ways. Resistance is in itself a fluid concept. In resisting the market ideology, fatshionistas mimic the hegemonic discursive practices adopted from the fashion and retail industry, and we see the same tactic (i.e. similarity seeking) working in two ways: on the one hand as resisting categorization, and on the other hand as sustaining normativity. These tensions highlight the complexities inherent in consumer resistance. We have also explicated how tackling normative violence experienced by marginalized groups may have market-level effects in today's socially connected world, where social media offers therapeutic means for self expression.

As managerial implications, this study suggests how both actors (the fashion market and the plus-sized consumer) would benefit if more choice was offered, and moreover, if this was done without discriminating labels that underline marginal consumer position, such as 'Big Girls'. Not only is plus-sized market the most rapidly growing one, but more importantly, and seeing how the transformative qualities of fashion in terms of identity have been documented (e.g. Connell, 2013), there is no reason why fashion industry could not be party to a larger consumer equality project,



exemplified by the fatshionista project. Rather than exercise the power to determine and restrict, fashion market would be wise to embark on enabling and nurturing different taste regimes.

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