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Hannah R. Long

Candidate

Communication & Journalism

Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Shinsuke Eguci, Chairperson

Dr. Myra Washington

Dr. Jaelyn DeMaria

Dr. Shadee Abdi, External member, San Francisco State University

**“FAT IS A QUEER ISSUE TOO”:
COMPLICATING QUEERNESS AND BODY SIZE
IN WOMEN’S SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND IDENTITY**

by

HANNAH R. LONG

A.A. Liberal Arts, Lehigh Carbon Community College, 2010
B.A. Psychology, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, 2013
B.A. Communication Studies, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, 2013
M.A. Speech Communication, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 2015

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Communication**

The University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July, 2020

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my fellow queer fat folks. I hope that I was able to do us justice and provide some ways for us to be able to at least take up some space on the page and in the minds of those who read this document.

To my eight interviewees, thank you for trusting me with your energy, your time, your stories and your experiences. I hope that I was able to treat what you so freely gave with care and respect. Thank you for being willing to share with me such intimate details of your selves.

To my inner child, to eight-year-old Hannah, who was shamed into thinking her body was a problem, you are not the problem, societal structures are. I'm sorry it took me so long to give you the love you deserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of my constant strivings is to live in gratitude, and so it is with deep and complete gratitude that I wish to enter this space and begin this document. This dissertation is the result of a lot of hard work and a lot of strength and support from a community of people; no one completely writes a dissertation alone. While it is impossible to name everyone that had a part in me completing this project, I wish to highlight a few specific folks in this moment without whom I would never have made any progress.

First, the interviewees: without your participation, I would have had nothing to talk about. Thank you for being willing to share some tough shit with me and allowing me to be the keyboard behind sharing your experience(s). Your trust and willingness to share with me touches my heart in a way that gives me hope for the future, and anyone who knows me knows how rare of a thing that is.

To my dissertation committee and those who mentored me on this journey: Drs. Shinsuke Eguchi, Myra Washington, Jaelyn DeMaria, and Shadee Abdi. Thank you for your labor (time, emotional, physical) that you contributed to my education and to this project. I have appreciated and grown from each of your insights and presence on my committee. Thank you for pushing me and encouraging me to dig deeper through this process. Thank you for your presence in my life these last five years.

I want to thank my chosen family, who supported me through every crisis over the past three years. I am especially grateful for the support of Charlie Verploegh and Kristopher Zink, who afforded me countless hours of kindness and empathy through this process. Writing a dissertation is an impossible thing to articulate to folks, and I am grateful to have had people in

my life who not only understood but provided support in a way I didn't know I needed until they offered it.

And while continuing to name individuals would result in another dissertation chapter, I do want to specifically acknowledge the labor of my advisor, Dr. Shinsuke Eguchi. We have both grown together so much over the last five years, and I am forever grateful for your patience and presence with me in the life and scholarship shifts that occurred over this last half a decade. Without you, Shin, I wouldn't have finished. Never did I ever think I would be finishing this dissertation during the pandemic, but here we are.

Lastly, to my dear pup Callie, without whom I literally would not have survived grad school and this dissertation process. Thanks, muffin.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the experiences of self-identified Lesbian-Bisexual-Queer-Transgender (LBQT) women wearing U.S. clothing size 1x and up. Drawing on research within queer theory, fat studies, and Crip theory, the main goal of this study is to explore how these women engage in their embodied everyday performances of the body and identity, particularly through looking at relationship to body and self, intersectional complications, and navigation of physical and discursive space(s). Through analyzing their narratives collected in in-depth interviews, I find that fatness contributes to how people see desire for their selves and others, community, and space-taking. Additionally, within the narratives of the participants’ ideologies around white femininity, whiteness, fatness and privilege and internalized fatphobia are present

and influential in how these women related to themselves and the world. Lastly, when considering everyday identity performance, notions of failure and success, relational understandings of queerness and then queerness as a political choice are significant to participants in understanding how their bodies and identities are read within the world.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

...fat bitch / whale / lazy / unintelligent / insatiable / too much / fatass / failure / ugly / sloppy / no self-control / monster / massive / unhealthy / unintelligent / your fault / desperate / before picture / lower earning potential / death wish / pre-existing condition / chair-breaker / last resort...

These stereotypes enter into my brain in a steady stream, a parade of unpleasanties, intrusive, uninvited guests as I write this project. But it is in spite of them, and perhaps because of them, that I enter this space. I have been called these things, or called myself these things, countless times. I am not separate from this project, from my participants; I am not immune from the very forces that I analyze in these pages. They are part of me.

I was eight years old when I went on my first diet, at the bequest and encouragement of my mother. “You’ll feel better,” she reassured me. Dieting = thin = better was programmed into my brain. Obsessively writing each number down, determined if I tracked and controlled my eating enough, I would be able to control my body and get it to do what I so desperately wanted (to be thin). From age 8 on, for the next 15 years, I spent my life in severely restricted eating. The first time I didn’t consciously count my calories was a moment of revolution for me; I had so much more brain space for other things!

I have struggled with a relationship to food, my body, myself, my desires, spaces and other people. I’ve been called a fat bitch and told to die in my blubber. I’ve been denied medical care because of my size. I’ve broken friends’ furniture. I’ve gotten bruises from spaces when my body exceeded the limits. I’ve avoided going to certain places because I know that my body will not fit. I’ve harmed myself because of these very words, experiences and thoughts. They are part of me.

I recognize that my narrative and experience are not unique, and this is why I sought to talk with others' who might have similar experiences. Perhaps being able to share in these experiences would help myself and others to feel less alone. It was my hope that through this project, I (and my participants), might find connection, camaraderie, and inclusion in places where we so often do not.

I begin this dissertation by offering a brief autoethnographic snapshot. Because this dissertation is so intrinsically tied in with who I am, I find it necessary to situate myself within this document, this discussion, and to frame my impetus behind this research. I was searching for greater understanding about my experiences as a queer fat woman, and hoping that in doing so, I would be able to offer some insight into novel communicative perspectives, particularly around body size and queerness. Throughout this document, I make efforts to gesture towards more performative ways of engaging with the content through moments of reflection and connection. I employ critical reflexivity in these moments to consider the way(s) that myself and my body are operating within the ever-present structures, as well as how my body, and the bodies of my participants, are operating within the quotidian, and the implications behind these every day choices and performances of identity.

Problem Statement, Rationale, and Research Goals

Problem Statement. Studying *queerness*, or the alignment of counter-normative and anti-oppressive efforts to resist oppressive structures of normativity, combined with gender identity and sexual orientation, is a political and intellectual movement to challenge and critique heteronormativity in and across societies, everyday discourses, and the academy (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Chavez, 2013; Eguchi & Asante, 2016; Eguchi, 2020; Eguchi & Calafell,

2020; Johnson, 2001; Jones & Calafell, 2012; Yep, 2008, 2013). I echo Chavez' (2013) operationalization of queerness as “a coalitional term, a term that always implies an intermeshed understanding of identity, subjectivity, power and politics located on the dirt and concrete where people live, work, and play” (p. 7). Queer theory has frequently been applied to issues surrounding sex, sexuality and the body (Adams & Berry, 2013; Ahmed, 2006; Alexander, 2004, 2014; Alexander & Warren, 2002; Butler 1990; 1993; Calafell, 2013; Fox, 2007; Fassett, 2010; Eguchi, 2009, 2014; Eguchi & Roberts, 2015; Johnson, 2001; McIntosh & Hobson, 2013; McRuer, 2006; Muñoz, 1999; Yep, 2013). The word *queer* has a history of being deployed as a slur against people who were not heterosexual and/or cisgender (people whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth). However, the word *queer* is also reclaimed. Queer is an intellectual and political stance to critique, resist, and shift the heteronormative logics that position one in a binary of straight-gay or man-woman. Heteronormativity, or the notion that being heterosexual is the normal, expected and socially correct way to engage in romantic and sexual relationships with other people, is connected to other systemic violence, including white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, classism, fatphobia and ableism (hooks, 2012; Jones, 2014). As Yep (2008) asserts, heteronormativity is “perhaps one of the most powerful forms of normalization in Western social systems” (p. 18). Heteronormativity purports the idea of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980; Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 2008), which assumes that people are straight until proven otherwise, reinforcing a strict gender binary, rendering those outside of this binary as abnormal.

Heteronormativity, as an ideological apparatus, presents itself as being entitled to know about queer sexual behavior and relationships, because of this perception of deviance from the normal. Due to this stressing of queerness as deviant, there has been some emphasis to make

queer folks appear more “normal” or to emphasize that they have similar lifestyles, hopes and/or dreams to straight people (Chavez, 2013; Eguchi, 2009; Eguchi & Roberts, 2015; Eguchi, Files-Thompson, & Calafell, 2017; McRuer, 2006; Rand, 2013; Yep, 2008). This emphasis is demonstrated within advertising campaigns designed to show that the only difference between queer people and straight people are that they love people of a similar gender to them. For example, in a popular campaign from the for-profit company FCKH8, they advertise t-shirts, bumper stickers and other accessories with the phrase, “Some chicks marry chicks. Get over it” (FCKH8.com). By telling people to “Get over it,” (FCKH8.com) the messages these products send encourage normalization of gayness, and in particular marriage equality. More recently, they have begun selling “Make America Gay Again” products, as a counter to Trump’s “Make America Great Again,” slogan, further attempting to embrace ideas of normativity, universality, and inclusion. Similarly, human-interest stories about queer folks seeking adoption are displayed as evidence that queers can be a “typical nuclear family,” with the only difference in the gender composition of the parents. This also reinforces this idea that the only difference between queer people and straight people is who they love; they have the same familial, national, and political goals. As Eguchi (2009) notes, queer subjects can feel the pressure to conform to heteronormative and white beauty/aesthetic standards as a way to “pass” as straight or present the version of gender expression they think is most attractive to others. Some note that this type of performance, as in Eguchi’s (2009) example of “straight-acting” gay men, is inauthentic and oppressive, or allows one to pass as heterosexual and benefit from that privilege (McIntosh & Hobson, 2013). However, as Muñoz (1999) notes, sometimes minoritarian subjects, such as queers, need to conform to majoritarian ways of expression in order to survive.

These familial, national and political systems work to dictate the ways that people can exist and relate to others, and in doing so, reward certain bodies and punish other bodies for the ways they take up space discursively, ideologically and physically (Abdi, 2014; Eguchi, Files-Thompson, & Calafell, 2018; Johnson, 2001; Jones, 2014; McCune, 2008; McIntosh & Hobson, 2013). Notions of proof, or the idea that one can provide sufficient evidence to establish their “verified” queerness, are based in heteronormative logics that reify the idea of “coming out” which, as LeMaster (2013) states, is based on white, western, individualistic ideas of identity and self. Not everyone is able to come out, whether for safety concerns, family, jobs, other relationships, etc. But the pressure that one has to be out to “prove” one’s gayness or queerness relies on visibility to verify one’s status as gay/queer. These notions of visibility, or being hailed as a queer subject, often rely on stereotypical markers associated with people who are not heterosexual. These notions of proof and visibility have long been utilized to establish the validity of people as queer or straight subjects.

Additionally, a deeper consideration of specific attention to the body in relation to queerness is needed to further expand conversations about identity, privilege, and marginalization. Queerness needs to be furthermore discussed in concert with body size and how body size and queerness relates to people’s understanding of the world and their selves, as well as how people choose to perform their identities in the everyday. As Ahmed (2005) mentions, queerness is also a spatial issue. By employing the concept of orientation in regards to spatial and sexual orientation, the way we direct our bodies determines how “in line” we are with dominant understandings of how to exist in space and in relation to others; the lines that we follow (or do not follow) shape our lives. Longhurst (2014) builds on Ahmed’s assertions about queerness disrupting lines to include bodies of size, noting that “queerness disrupts and reorders

these relations of proximity by not following accepted paths; so too does having a body that does not confirm to a normative size and shape” (p. 22). This is crucial to call attention to, as our physical bodies are inextricably connected to how we see and exist within the world, and therefore the physical space(s) our body takes up is a significant site of knowledge production and understanding (Adams & Berry, 2013; Chavez, 2009; Eguchi, Calafell & Files-Thompson, 2014; Johnson, 2001; Yep, 2010, 2013).

Due to this material significance, fatness and queerness cannot be considered outside of race, class and ability. As hooks (2012) articulates, we live in an “imperialist, capitalist white supremacist patriarchy” (2012, p. 4), and these imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist and patriarchal systems function simultaneously and in differently intersecting ways; we need to consider the intersections of privilege and oppression that can function simultaneously within people’s bodies. Being marginalized in one area, such as sexuality, does not negate the privileges that one may receive in other areas, such as race and class. Identity is not a simple algebra problem; rather, the ways that people see themselves within systemic institutions are complicated and explicitly tied to history, context, and distribution(s) of power. In considerations of body size and queerness, the everyday materialities of race, gender, class, and ability are vital in understanding how a person of size might experience their larger body differently within broader societal and interpersonal contexts. For example, a queer person of size who is also a person of color will likely experience fatphobia, homophobia and racism functioning simultaneously, while a queer white person of size will not deal with homophobia and fatphobia impacted by racism. In other words, not all people of the same body size experience the world in the same way, necessitating an intersectional analysis.

Within a communication studies context, and more specifically via the lens of critical communication studies, scholars like Yep (2008, 2013), Calafell and Moreman (2010), Chavez (2013) and Eguchi (2015) demonstrate the need for intersectionality. However, as many scholars (i.e. Calafell, 2014; Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs & McIlwain, 2018; Chavez, 2013; Eguchi & Collier, 2018; Yep, 2008; 2013) assert, legacies of white supremacy, homophobia, sexism, colonization, and xenophobia still persist within the discipline of communication studies, despite claims of intersectional involvement. In particular, within Yep's (2008) germinal piece on the violence of heteronormativity in communication studies, he stresses the overwhelming power of heteronormativity, that it is, as mentioned earlier, "perhaps one of the most powerful forms of normalization in Western social systems" (p. 18). Due to this heteronormative bias, he notes that the discipline of communication studies has largely been in need of more conversations about sexuality. Chavez (2013) also notes this need in her article on queer intercultural communication, highlighting the lack of journal space that has often been afforded within communication studies for queer topics. Similar arguments have been made about the overwhelming whiteness of communication studies (Calafell, 2014; Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs & McIlwain, 2018), whereas many branches of research are culpable for "using the words diversity and intersectionality as signals or placeholders for commitment" (Calafell, 2014, p. 266). These perspectives can be utilized to signal a supposed commitment to ideas of diversity and intersectionality, but are often not tangibly evident or engaged with beyond being a "placeholder."

Other scholars, such as Valles-Morales & LeMaster (2015), reinforce the need for considerations of materiality as a potential way to shift disciplinary focus, or "corporeal interventions" (p. 79). Specifically, for queer of color critique within communication studies, Valles-Morales and LeMaster (2015) stress allowing for spaces to exist where conversations

about identity are not “taught as an addendum,” (p. 79) but rather afford room for bodily epistemology and connections of theory and criticism to “the tangible world, from lived experience” (p. 79). Utilizing bodily epistemology allows for shifts in the ways that normative ideological dominance plays out within the discipline. Yep (2008) also discusses, in addition to this ideological dominance within communication studies, (also mentioned in Chevrette, 2013), heterosexuality is so pervasive and discursively dominant that people find it appropriate to ask queer folks intrusive queries such as, “how do you have sex?” or “who’s the man?” The obsession with sexual knowledge of queer relationships functions as a way to solicit “proof” to establish queerness, and is based off of cissexist understandings of sexual engagement. These questions, then, are indirectly (and directly) asking about who is being penetrated.

This is significant to note because, as Eguchi & Roberts (2015) mention, the notion of male anal penetration is constructed as more feminine, and the person who bottoms/receives is seen as weaker. This allows for people to see one relational partner as the “man” or the “top,” reinforcing a power binary based in heterosexual understandings of sexual engagement and potentially reifying gendered stereotypes and sexist prejudices. By questioning penetration or sexual activities, this allows for people to center their conceptions of queerness on sexual interactions instead of other aspects of loving relationships or the overwhelming omnipresence of inequality that queer folks face in many spheres of life. This is also connected to the materiality of the body, as this stress to appear normal and to assimilate into the nation-state (Puar, 2011) allows one a degree of normalcy and privilege. This interpolation of queerness into the U.S. imperialist nationalist project (as Puar, 2007 writes) assists in establishing a new orthodoxy, or homonormativity.

Homonormativity is the idea that there are normal or expected ways of being gay and lesbian (that do not threaten heteronormativity) that are supported, reinforced, and encouraged by dominant societal structures and practices such as education, politics, the military and medical industrial complexes. This concept of homonormativity fosters into broader cultural understandings about futurity, legacy, and identity. Homonormativity also allows some to fit more into dominant scripts and excludes others, further disciplining LGBT/queer bodies (Chavez, 2013; Eguchi, Files-Thompson, & Calafell, 2018; Puar, 2007; Yep, 2013). Ng (2013) discusses how homonormativity contributes to “gaystreaming” on networks like *Logo*. Ng describes the strategy of gaystreaming as efforts to recruit more heterosexual women and gay men to viewership of specific television programming targeted at the LGBT community, such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and *Noah’s Arc*. By perpetuating certain stereotypical representations of gay men (white, financially mobile, successful, able-bodied, attractive, catty), this programming reinforces a homonormative subject position and alienates those who do not fit into these particular categories and reduces “the need for niche” (Ng, 2013, p. 274). This means that there is even more homogenizing being done so that producers of media content do not have to address the individuality within the queer community.

Papacharissi & Fernback (2008) also discuss homonormativity in relation to *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. They examine how queer representations in television media are part of a larger poor execution of sexual diversity, and instead “homosexuality is usually just implied through a homoerotic subtext and/or drag costuming and sometimes more openly depicted through the presence of gay characters in secondary roles” (pp. 348-349). By simplifying representations of queerness to stereotypes or secondary roles, these choices shape dominant and popular understandings about what it means to be queer. Another point that the authors raise is

the need to consider that the binaristic conception of straight versus gay viewers is no longer “an adequate framework” (p. 365) as “homonormativity presents a complex negotiation of hetero and homo identity boundaries, engineered to appease and appeal to a variety of audiences” (p. 365). Instead, the authors suggest considering “homoternativity,” or the way that “the gay population perceives itself and its place within the mainstream” (p. 366) as a way to complicate the often-utilized homo/heteronormative binary. Because how the queer community “perceives itself and its place within the mainstream” (p. 36), the issue of body size presents itself as a perfect point of analysis. That is to say, while this work is important and nuanced in capturing the frictions in contemporary gay community and belonging, I now aim to elaborate the relevant convergence of body size as it pertains to queerness.

Body size is yet another way that queer bodies have been discursively, ideologically and physically regulated and dismissed as not being “normal.” In a similar vein to queer, the word “fat” has a derogatory connotation behind its application. However, fat studies activists and scholars argue that being able to reclaim the word allows for one to take back the power that this word has had at the hands of people afraid of the stigma of being a body of size. The reason for considering body size alongside of queerness, is that body size is often a part of one’s self that influences daily interactions, such as access to spaces, people, events, and services. While there has been some work on the bias of the medical community about fat patients (Farrell, 2011; Murray, 2005; Pantenburg et al, 2012), there is much less work considering the impact of body size and sexual orientation (i.e. impact of body size and relationships, employment, and/or discrimination) as well as the implications of body size in conjunction with gender expression and race. However, body size and people’s perceptions of what is deemed “attractive” are a large

part of dating/engaging romantically and relationally with other bodies and how those bodies are read (Chavez, 2009).

Fat bodies are assumed to be lazy, unhealthy, unattractive and out-of-control (Jones, 2014; Longhurst, 2014; Saguy & Ward, 2011), whereas thin bodies (specifically women's) are considered "moral/good/controlled/refined" (Kristjansson, 2014, p. 133). Fat bodies have been labeled as a public health crisis, in similar ways that queers have been associated with threats to public health; fat (and queer) bodies threaten normative ideologies about health, attractiveness and morality. Therefore, to be queer and fat is to be deemed a double public health threat and threat to normativity, as "they are conceived as perverse, excessive, unnatural, and a threat to the social order" (Wykes, 2014, p. 3).

Fatphobic attitudes prevail throughout many spheres of U.S. culture, particularly in regards to "concerns" about health and morality. The diet industry (tied into the medical-industrial complex) stresses that fat bodies are "a failed body project" (Murray, 2005, p. 155), which signify excess, lack of discipline, and a lack of control and conformity (Bailey, 2010). Fatness equates with death; fat people are constantly seen as ill, on the verge of life-threatening diseases because of their size, or assumed to not care about themselves. As a result, people of size are deemed unworthy of love and positive attention (Hopkins, 2012), and these choices are often made under the guise of providing "motivation" for the person of size to lose weight and shape their body in a more socially acceptable form; as Jones (2014) articulates, "Fat performances are performances of failure" (p. 45). This is one of the more insidious ways that body shaming becomes manifest within various institutions throughout culture.

Within the LGBTQ+¹ community, body shaming has been a pervasive issue, with fat bodies often on the receiving ends of jokes and stigmatized in dating if their bodies are a certain size, type of gender expression or race (Arnold, 2018; Braithwaite, 2016; Brosseau, 2017). As feminist researchers have noted over the last several decades (Farrell, 2011; Griffin, 2012; Wolf, 1991; Wotasik, 2014), the ways that women understand their bodies carry deep implications for many aspects of their lives. White women who are deemed conventionally attractive (e.g. thin, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class) are afforded more employment opportunities, and are typically judged more positively overall (Shome, 2014; Wann, 2009). While many researchers have contributed to the literature about women's bodies and objectification (e.g. Bordo, 2004; Brumberg, 1997; Kozee & Tlyka, 2006; Soloway & Rothblum, 2009), very few have considered the way(s) that lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women relate to their bodies. Particularly for women seeking women, employing arguments about objectification is only part of the battle, since sexual attraction is not necessarily being sought about through the "male gaze." However, existing within an overwhelmingly omnipresent patriarchal society, even women seeking women cannot exist fully outside of the constructed ideals of men's perceptions of beauty and attractiveness along the lines of bodies.

Scholars have asserted that fat bodies, and in particular fat women's bodies, represent a binary: hypersexualized/fetishized and desexualized/disgusting/grotesque (Braziel, 2001), especially when viewed within the context of heteronormativity. As Gailey (2012) writes,

The fat female body is frequently not considered to align with the feminine ideal because it symbolizes domination or resistance to idealized femininity and overconsumption. Moreover, fat women are perceived as out of control, which

¹ The + is a way to represent broader inclusion within the queer community, recognizing the limitations of an acronym in including individual identities and impossibilities in representing all the way(s) that everyone identifies within the LGBTQ spectrum.

represents resistance and a threat to hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchal order of society (p. 116).

When highlighting the lack of consideration on race and fatness, McCalphin & Tango (2014) stress the ways that this binary functions similarly, but with notable difference, for women of color. They mention that often they receive invalidation of their discrimination as fat women of color, because (white) fat activists claim that women of color are “lucky to be born into a culture that desired fat women” (p. 141), which functions “as a sort of white woman oppression Olympics designed to insinuate we fat WOC have it so much easier” (p. 143). These sorts of conceptions further exoticize and eroticize images of women of color (Shimizu, 2007), and in particular, these ideas function off of tokenizing and damaging stereotypes.

Rationale and Research Goals. In addition to the lack of research about fat women of color, Wykes (2014) also notes that most of the previous feminist research on bodies recenters thin bodies when discussing disordered eating and the societal pressure to be thin; “The specious stereotype of the fat lesbian who ‘turns to women’ because she’s ‘too ugly to get a man’ suggests that it may be...only slender bodies are presented as legitimate objects of heterosexual desire” (p. 1). Jones (2014) also notes that for fat feminine bodies, they are often “twice removed” from the positioning as a desirable subject where “the symbolic masculine power of defining the desirability of women’s bodies” (p. 41) functions in conjunction with the thin ideal. Because of this “twice removed social rejection,” (p. 41) these bodies are seen as “distinctly queer (that is, it is structurally external to the heteropatriarchal binary)” (p. 41). Gailey (2012) conducted a study on fat women’s sexual and dating experiences, but mainly looked at heterosexual participants and relationship configurations, reinforcing heteronormative expectations about relationality. Therefore, as this is an under-researched but clearly important topic, this dissertation will be concerned with analyzing the way(s) that queerness and body size interact and inform each other.

However, as with the word *queer*, not all people of size identify themselves as fat; this is a particular linguistic and ideological choice that one has to ascribe. Similarly, not every person who identifies on the LGBTQ+ spectrum identifies as queer. For example, for many people of size, the word “obese” is thrown onto them from the medical-industrial complex, and that word choice carries with it specific medical and moral connotations, such as unhealthy, pathological, or gluttonous (Farrell, 2011; Murray, 2005; Pantenburg et al, 2012). For that reason, some who identify with the word fat choose to avoid using what is commonly referred to as “the o word” (obese/obesity). Since the word *fat* also carries with its derogatory connotations, if someone has not reclaimed the word for themselves, it is not an accurate semantic choice to reflect how they see their body (Wann, 2009). For those that do use *fat* as a self-descriptor and/or political choice (similar to the way *queer* can function), the association of the word carries much different implications. For some, the use of the word signifies pride, an identity, and/or an allegiance to fat liberation, similarly to how some choose to use *queerness*. Seeking to interview self-ascribed fat and queer women could present a difficulty in locating participants, as fat is still not as commonly embraced of a term as the word *queer*. In other words, people would likely be more comfortable with using *queer* over using *fat* because there is still a strong stigma associated with the word *fat*. Accordingly, within this dissertation, I specifically choose to look at body size by asking for participants who identify as wearing US clothing size 1x and up. The rationale for this choice of distinction is that plus size clothing, which represents garments that are beyond the sizes typically carried in most stores, begins at 1x. This is also typically the point where fat activists have marked the entrance to a fatter embodiment, in terms of what one has access to, or is excluded from, based on their body size.

However, while arguably a significant aspect of communication, in that we communicate *in physical bodies*, body size has not frequently been a discussion across scholarship, and in particular communication and critical scholarship. The rationale for including scholarship that considers the intersections of body size and queerness is as follows. First, bodies have been implicated within the literature of queer theory and queer of color critique for decades. The importance of materiality has been well established, as mentioned earlier (Ahmed, 2006; Alexander, 2004, 2014; Alexander & Warren, 2002; Butler 1990; 1993; Calafell, 2013; Fassett, 2010; Fox, 2007; Eguchi, 2009, 2015; Eguchi & Roberts, 2015; Johnson, 2001; McRuer, 2006; Muñoz, 1999; Yep, 2013). However, the conversations on the significance of bodies of size in relation to everyday queer experience(s) and reality/ies require more specific attention than they currently receive (Wykes, 2014). Conversations on (dis)ability and queerness (and queerness and race) have complicated this material concern, however combining queer theory, crip theory, and fat studies, would be a way to further complicate our conversations about bodies.

Second, as another form of marginalized identity during this current socio-political-historical moment, fatness brings certain ontological orientations to culture, communication, and self. Existing as a larger body within a broader systemic structure that is built for smaller bodies and rewards those smaller bodies while punishing larger bodies, means that people of size understand the world in a particular way. People of size typically understand the ways that thin privilege functions, often invisibly, in casual yet corrosive ways. For example, people of size are usually hyper-aware of whether furniture in a particular space is able to accommodate their bodies, and how not having a guarantee that one will fit into the chairs affects their desire to engage in activities or feel included. People of size also typically understand how fat shaming affects the ways that medical professionals engage with them, and whether they will be treated or

told to lose weight and come back. With such instances of embodied knowledge, people of size know things about the world differently than thinner bodies often do, which reinforces the need to consider how body size impacts one's everyday enactment of identity².

Third, fatphobic attitudes and institutions are also tied to the same institutions that homophobic, racist, and (dis)ableist attitudes and policies are (medical industrial complex, prison industrial complex, capitalism, nationalism, homophobia). Institutions that seek to enact more social bodily regulation, such as with access to reproductive freedoms and governmental restrictions on such, also make it harder for people of size to gain access to healthcare. Fatness (or "obesity") is considered a pre-existing condition, making it difficult for people of size to get adequate medical insurance. Fat shaming is also frequently used as a tactic to make someone appear less than or to demonstrate the worst stereotypes of Americans (Farrell, 2011; Wann, 2009), highlighting how nationalistic ideas about aesthetics come into play. Additionally, the lack of access to fashionable, attractive and affordable clothing for people of size is well documented (Gruys, 2012; Murray, 2005) despite the demand being present. Looking at body size allows for another lens to be added to this institutional indictment via critical scholarship.

Therefore, since queerness and fatness are self-avowed identities and are not something that can be placed onto people without their consent, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, I will be investigating issues of social body regulation and individual relationships to bodies by asking lesbian, queer, bisexual and/or trans women to articulate how they understand their relationship to their bodies. In doing so, I intend to provide a snapshot of how body size, in this current

² I am not specifically requiring participants to identify with "fat," but rather specifying that participants of a certain body size and be involved. However, the use of the word is still prudent to draw from the contributions of fat studies scholars because 1) fat studies scholars have worked to broaden the discussion of bodies and body size from a thin focus, and 2) fat studies work often considers materiality differently in a way that can be used in concert with queer and crip theory, as will be expanded upon later in this document.

social, political, and historical moment, relates to LBQT women's understanding about their bodies and identities.

Research Questions

For this dissertation project, the central question I seek to answer is, "how do lesbian, bisexual, queer and trans (LBQT) identified women size 1x and up engage in their embodied everyday performances of the body and identity?" This central question will be addressed through the additional exploration of the following three sub-questions:

1. How do women size 1x and up everyday make sense of their LBQT identifications and their bodies in relationships to others and themselves?
2. How does intersectionality complicate LBQT women size 1x and up's understandings of their body and performing their identity/ies everyday?
3. How do size 1x and up women navigate physical and discursive space and places?

In the following chapter, I will lay out the relevant literature from queer theory, crip theory, and fat studies. This critique of normativity and challenging of dominant discourses guides this dissertation; as stated within this introductory section, this research seeks to address how LBQT women engage in their embodied performances of the body and identity. Being that all bodies exist within these systems, it is important to provide a review of the literature that is most suited for addressing this question.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I review the literature as follows: 1) literature tracing the beginnings of queer theory and contributions of queer of color critique, 2) literature on crip theory and its application to queer theory/ies, and 3) literature from fat studies that provides a foundation for conversations about the body, and in particular the body of size. In reviewing these literatures, I will contextualize my study for exploring with how LBQT women size 1x and up engage in their embodied quotidian performances of the body and identity.

Queer Theory

Beginnings of Queer Theory in Academia. Contemporary queer theory first surfaced in the 1990s, expanding on the efforts of feminist theories arising out of the civil rights era. Early queer theory was focused on disrupting the binaries that drive normative understandings of gender and sexuality (such as gay-straight, man-woman, etc.). In her text *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) discusses how language, discourse, philosophy, and identity have informed and contributed to the way(s) in which we conceive of and perform gender. She questions how normativity and psychoanalytic models have shaped the way we view gender, and therefore, heteronormativity and sexuality in general. Butler argues that heteronormativity is what drives such a binaristic view of gender; if one is to ascertain whom they are to partner with, gender needs to be clear so one can distinguish who is a viable partner and who is not.

This poststructuralist orientation towards gender and sexuality is a fundamental aspect of a particular version of queer theory and its resistance to definition and stability as well as a questioning of the status quo; reflecting the conception of identity as fluid (Chavez, 2013). This is why there is still contention over what exactly “queer” means, and what exactly queer theory is. However, there are some who would argue that while this fluidity is important, there needs to

be some confines that delineate what is or is not queer/queer theory as well as who is included in these conversations and conceptions of queer. Particularly, scholars of color (e.g. Calafell, 2013, 2014; Chavez, 2013; Eguchi, 2014; Hill Collins, 2004; Johnson, 2001; Johnson, 2013; Muñoz, 1999, 2009) have called for the greater consideration of race, class, gender identity, and ability to be considered alongside of conversations about sexual orientation.

These conversations about sexual orientation were built off of this heteronormative drive for gender binaries. Through this, scholars examined the idea of compulsory heterosexuality. Compulsory heterosexuality, as a term, was largely popularized through Adrienne Rich (1980), in her groundbreaking article, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” in which she argues that heterosexuality needs to be considered as a political institution rather than only as an orientation. She highlights ways that men’s dominance has led to a default pairing of men and women; compulsory heterosexuality benefits men and damages women (“compulsory heterosexuality is the maintenance of the mother-son relationship between women and men” p. 647). Because of this “default,” women who embrace a lesbian existence engage “both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life” (p. 649). In particular, this “rejection of a compulsory way of life” (p. 649) functions as a way to work towards rejection of the heteropatriarchy.

By tying heteronormativity in with patriarchy, hooks (2013) discusses how women are made to “constantly compete against one another, to see one another as enemies” (55), which works “to prevent bonds of solidarity between women across class and race” (48). When women are pitted against each other, specifically because of race, white women will bond together and uphold white supremacy. Particularly, hooks discusses how white supremacy will maintain itself above all else; this is echoed by Ferguson (2004) who states that heteropatriarchy is held as the

appropriate standard, but that heteronormativity is racialized as well. White queers are afforded to be hetero/homonormative but queers of color cannot be normative as they do not meet the standard deemed by the “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2013, p. 4).

Additionally, part of this taboo and rejection of the heteropatriarchy is tied into notions of futurity, as some queer theorists have noted within the anti-relational turn (Edelman, 2007).

However, Muñoz (2009) has argued that this conception of futurity based on anti-relationality is limited and only allows for the inclusion of some queers into this ideology, particularly white queers. Without considering the intersections, Muñoz reminds us that this “merely reproduces a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly attemporal” (p. 94) because the present and past material realities of queerness are vital when theorizing queer relations to futurity and time.

He argues that we need to have collectivity as queers and that “queerness is primarily about futurity and hope” (p. 11) as “queerness is always on the horizon” (p. 11). He extends this argument and encourages queers to strive towards feeling hope and feeling the utopic vision instead of the anti-relational lack of hope for the future. Essentially, Muñoz purports that we are not actually queer yet (p. 22) but are working towards imaging a queerness in the future:

“Queerness is utopian, and there is something utopian about queerness” (p. 26). Through the orientation of queerness toward the horizon, Muñoz, at the same time, caringly instructs us to imagine, locate and realize concrete utopias in the here and now. This notion of queer-worldmaking functions as a way to locate fissures within heteronormative systems enabling moments of agency. His particular queer take on identifying agentic action within the mundane becomes the queer futurity I find myself interested in. In this stress on identifying the agentic, Muñoz offers the ability and recognition that the everyday matters for queer folks, and in mundane being, great deal can be learned in queer worldmaking.

Queer of Color Critique. From this, a queer of color critique (QOCC) maintains a more complex analysis of the everyday as it affects queer people in regards to race and gender outside of the binary. As seen in the previous section, earlier branches of queer theory only looked at heteronormativity as it relates to queerness, but QOCC tells us that there is more to that; critiquing heteropatriarchy solely is not enough. With the perspective of a QOCC, we are able to get a more complex and thorough critical understanding of the machinations of nation via “imperialist capitalist white supremacist patriarchy” (hooks, 2013, p. 4). Within this section, I will expand on how interdisciplinary scholars doing work that I understand to embody a QOCC, some explicit like Ferguson (2004) but some not claiming that title, such as Anzaldúa (1987) and Puar (2007, 2011, 2013), shift the conversation(s) to a more intersectional and interconnected analysis.

QOCC expands contributions of women of color feminisms (Anzaldúa, 1987; Carillo-Rowe, 2008, 2010; Chavez, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Davis, 1983; Griffin, 2012; Hill Collins, 2008; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; hooks, 2013; Washington, 2017). Women of color are often not credited but often originated many of the ideas that QOCC focuses on, such as materiality. The idea of theory in the flesh comes from Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (2015), and “means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (p. 19). A theory in the flesh states that the body knows, “the body is smart” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 59-60), and the queer articulations of this are what is really important. For example, Anzaldúa’s lived reality of being a lesbian *mestiza*, “raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight” (p. 41), is vital for understanding the contributions of her work; one cannot separate body from experience

from her work. Anzaldúa's raced, sexed, gendered, physical, temporal, spatial relationship to the world is crucial to seeing her perspective on materiality.

This complication of materiality is just one of the ways that QOCC expands on the conversations of queer theory, with respect to the interconnectedness of systems of oppression. Connecting these systems, Eguchi (2020) defines "queerness as a temporal moment of counterhegemonic transgression in and across the lines of power differentials (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nation, class, language, and the body)" (p. 70). In the quintessential text *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Ferguson (2005) stresses the interplay of capitalism as a reinforcer of the heteropatriarchy. Ferguson looks at the way the U.S. pathologizes Black folks along the lines of desires and sexuality and the way that they deviated from typical familial structures; he highlights how Black folks are allowed to be heterosexual but not heteronormative because they are not white and therefore not "normative." Within this idea of normativity, he discusses how Black single mothers are denied access to social services and care, as well as the liberal agentic narrative that white single mothers are. He offers an articulation of the shift of racialized discourse from a medical model towards a pathologization of Black people via culture (biological racism vs "it's their culture") with social systems such as schools.

Continuing on the critique of the liberal agentic narrative, scholars center the issue of homonationalism (Puar, 2007) and its connection to the nation state (Chavez, 2013) and the way(s) this renders certain queer bodies as "worthy of protection by nation-states" (Puar, 2013, p. 336). Homonationalism, according to Puar, manifests in three distinct but connected ways: 1) U.S. sexual exception, 2) Queer as regulatory and 3) the ascendancy of whiteness. U.S. sexual exception refers to the United States' assertion of superiority and the ignorance of the human

rights violations within the U.S., instead pointing the finger outward “elsewhere” (p. 5). In terms of regarding queer as regulatory, Puar connects to the frame of biopolitics, referencing that queerness is always already about “disciplining and control” (p. 24), “deviance” (p. 24), and can link one in with “ascent toward whiteness” (p. 24). That ascendancy of whiteness is having access to capital, embracing of the “(neo)liberal ideologies of difference” for function within capitalism.

Through these modalities, homonationalism “operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects” (p. 2). This normativity creates a legal and representational connection of queers into “the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism” (p. 9) which renders them/us complicit in these systems and normative ideologies. Part of the political agendas of U.S. imperialism are an “embrace of a sexually progressive multiculturalism justifying foreign intervention” (Puar, 2013, p. 336). Puar (2013) in particular uses the example of Abu Gharib and U.S. involvement as an example of this, which “rely on Orientalist constructions of Muslim male sexuality as simultaneously queer and dangerously premodern” (p. 336). While Puar is still looking at the Global North and frames her work in relation to the U.S., this critique is important work and allows for more nuanced looks at sexual orientation and identity.

Muñoz (1999; 2009) also expands these conversations by complicating how we understand and conceive of identity. In particular, he coins the term *disidentification*, which he defines as something that is “meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative

citizenship” (p. 4). Within the text, Muñoz discusses the complexity of identity, particularly for minoritarian subjects. As he states, “The fiction of identity is one that is accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects. Minoritarian subjects need to interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own sense of self” (p. 5). Muñoz complicates the conversation on the politics of identity, as way(s) that we often identify or assume people’s identities based on how we perceive them are based off of “phobic energies around race, sexuality, gender, and labor” (p. 6). When people do not fit the (identity) scripts that are assigned, “a representational contract is broken” (p. 6) and so it is harder to place those who violate that contract. Essentially, Muñoz troubles many of the ways that we have often theorized identity and challenges us to nuance them further. The term *disidentification* is a clear proclivity towards communication; this language gives us a clear understanding of how we find resistance with(in) language and communication.

Another important consideration that many queer-of-color theorists raise is the idea of understanding power in more fluid ways, as for Muñoz, disidentification does not conceive of “power as a fixed discourse” (p. 19). He challenges discourses that conceive of power and identity as a fixed conception, like the white feminist conception of an ‘ideal feminist subject’ without considering the intersecting oppressions and privileges that create vastly different feminists and feminist experiences. Disidentification is “an ambivalent modality” (p. 28) and thereby does not have one stable method just as power is not one stable conception. It is also “about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” (p. 31) using the mainstream codes and cues as “raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (p. 31). So, in this way, there is no real ‘neat’ or ‘tidy’ conceptualization of disidentification, because identification, counter identification, and

disidentification are all messy endeavors within particular power structures, which themselves are messy.

Through work that challenges the anti-relational turn, scholars like Muñoz embrace a more anti-anti relational orientation. The notion of an anti-relational orientation towards queerness is not a fully feasible idea for all queers. As Muñoz proffers within his text *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*,

The present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational' expectations...Let me be clear that the idea is not simply to turn away from the present. One cannot afford such a maneuver, and if one thinks one can, one has resisted the present in favor of folly. The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds (p. 27)

Muñoz is not proposing an eschewing of the present, as the current spatio-temporalities are also significant to “queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging...” Rather, he is prompting us to consider that not all queers even have the privilege “to get to grow up” (p. 96); the present is only truly accessible for some. This is a concept that is further elaborated on within crip theory as well.

Crip Theory

In the introduction to McRuer’s (2006) *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Bérubé notes the difficulty of trying to “theorize multiple forms of identity, and multiple strategies of disidentification, in conjunction with each other” (p. vii). However, McRuer’s work is a heuristic which allows for some complication of multiplicative identity

formulation. McRuer makes the connection between compulsory heterosexuality and the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness, where both function as a “nonidentity” that goes unnoticed unless it varies from the normalized and expected (heterosexuality and able-bodiedness), and both are “showcased” throughout various institutions and settings within U.S. macroculture. In other words, being an able-bodied heterosexual is the default assumption and our broader macrocultural infrastructure is built upon the idea that the majority of people are straight and able-bodied. Disability, McRuer argues, is seen as a flaw. This flaw prevents the person from being completely interpolated into the national heteronormative and able-bodied subject that best serves the nation-state, which in turn, results in a “failed” performance that ascribes particular meaning to the body and the self. This is where crip theory connects to queer and fat studies.

The term *crip* has a similar history to queer and fat, in that it is a term adopted from a slur used against people who were/are not able-bodied. McRuer notes that this is sometimes claimed by people who do not live with physical impairments, but that experience some sort of embodiment outside of the normative. He uses this concept fluidity to argue that, while similar to the term queer, we are not all disabled and not all crip and we are never disabled or crip one hundred percent of the time. His argument for this is that although we may be queer and/or crip, it is “impossible to sustain in a cultural order that privileges heterosexuality/able-bodied identity and that compels all of us, no matter how distant we might be from the ideal, into repetitions that approximate those norms” (p. 158). In other words, because we live in a society that demands us to do so, we occasionally attempt to adhere towards more normative expressions. Particularly for folks with invisible disabilities, the pressure to appear “normal” may mean that they engage in coping strategies that afford them more access to the ideal.

This assertion that we are being compelled into repetitions that reflect broader cultural norms is important to note, as this striving towards “normalcy” is where we are given our moments of relief; our marginalized identity is seen as being “okay,” but it is usually at the expense of another marginalized group and it never lasts (McRuer, 2006). Drawing from McRuer’s work, Kafer (2003) also writes about compulsory able-bodiedness in relation to compulsory heterosexuality. She makes similar arguments to Rich (1980) and McRuer (2005), in that both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness function as an “alleged naturalness and normalcy” (p. 78) which lead it, therefore, to not be questioned. Kafer highlights how able-bodiedness is conveyed as the ideal: one does not want to be disabled if at all possible. This is tied in with the point that so often disability is only assumed when there are visible markers (such as mobility devices) to indicate that the person is not able-bodied (in a similar way that queerness is only assumed when there are so-called “visible” markers, such as aesthetic choices). However, for those with invisible (or less-visible) disabilities, this can block their access to services and social inclusion. Additionally, Kafer argues that we cannot consider able-bodiedness and heterosexuality separately; to do so loses the “interrelationship” (p. 82) of the two and their potential to disrupt institutions.

The interconnectedness of these systems of heteronormativity and ableism is significant to consider, particularly in the ways that they might influence understandings of identity. McIntosh & Hobson (2013) remind us that identities are “relational and contextually influenced” and “are not stagnant, but are moving in relation to space, time, history, culture, and politics” (p. 2). This is another aspect of Kafer’s (2003) argument: when we consider queerness as separate from sexuality, we are removing the historical context where people with mental disabilities have been portrayed as hypersexualized or deviant (similarly to queerness), the constant questioning

of disabled individuals about their ability to engage in sexual activity, as well as the homophobia that exists within the disabled community. Disability and queerness are inherently tied together.

Further connecting the idea of “the unremarked norm,” (p. 22), Longhurst (2014) calls attention to the idea that thinner bodies, like those that are heterosexual and able-bodied are often not marked. Within this unremarked norm of compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, bodies that exist outside of these spheres of normalcy (like those that are fat, queer, disabled) represent a demotion to the periphery of heteronormativity. This rendering is what can position queer and fat bodies as queer (Wykes, 2014). Although, comparably to McRuer’s assertion that not all disability is queer, Wykes (2014) asserts that not all fat is queer too.

To return to notions of queer futurity, Kafer (2013) adds to the critique of Edelman that the figure of the child is always able-bodied. When Munoz (2009) critiques Edelman’s figure of the child, he asserts that the child is never brown. And so, with race and ability, the child is always already thin; the child of the future is never fat, of color, or disabled. Here we see the workings of futurity yet again and the temporal locales of fatness. Fatness is never rendered into the future because 1) fat people are always relegated to death through the medical model 2) the medical model shapes and informs societal values and beliefs about fatness.

Fat Studies

Similar to disability, people of size represent a threat to the idea of bodily stability and resulting privilege (that queerness and crippling works to destabilize as well; desire and ability are not inherently fixed and able-bodied privilege is not permanent). Fat people signify instability (LeBesco, 2014) and excess (Bailey, 2010); fat people who are not constantly working to diminish their size are often accused of “glorifying obesity” or “promoting unhealthy lifestyles,” simply by their existence. The fat body spotlights the idea of bodily fluidity

(LeBesco, 2014) and is therefore seen as a hazardous potentiality. This mindset is reinforced through the diet and weight loss (entertainment) industry and in reality shows such as *The Biggest Loser*. Through this reinforcing of the idea that fatness = bad, larger bodies are also marked as undesirable. This (un)desirability occurs as 1) physical and material undesirability for self and 2) sexual and romantic undesirability for partners. Both of these notions of (un)desirability assume the fat body is unattractive and something to be feared and avoided. The trope of someone “stooping” to have sex with someone fat” (Lee, 2014, p. 89) is one highly prevalent example of this. To engage sexually with a fat body is marked as a failure to be able to attain someone who is more “conventionally” attractive.

As Murray (2005) comments, “The fat body is discursively constructed as a failed body project” (p. 155), since the fat body signifies lack of discipline and adherence to normativity. Part of that adherence to normativity is the expectation that “individuals are expected to lose weight for each ‘straight’ time ‘achievement,’ while the moral panic around ‘letting oneself go’ after these achievements is simultaneously deployed” (McFarland, Slothouber, & Taylor, 2017, p. 136). If one is fat, one is expected to lose weight and keep that weight off. The fat body that is “apologetic of our size, and seen as trying to change our size” is “given a sort of approval” (Wotasik, 2014, p. 131) because through this apology (publicly dieting, fat talking, fat shaming, exercising for weight loss, etc.) the fat body is working on being “not fat.” This working on being “not fat,” of course is an indication of success and “good” behavior.

In addition to the idea that fat bodies should be in a constant state of apology (Taylor, 2018) is the conception of the “good fatty” (Cameron, 2019). The “good fatty” is rendered acceptable “either because it is diseased, or remains fat despite proving itself to be physically active and healthy” (p. 260). The “good fatty” is never truly considered acceptable, but is

tolerated because she “at least publically flogs herself for the sin of excess pounds” (Stryker, 2016). The “good fatty” is a potentially dangerous approach, as it engages in “treating fat as the result of something, for example, an uncontrollable biological symptom of a disease such as PCOS” which “ultimately constructs fat bodies as needing an explanation that other bodies do not. This approach maintains difference and exclusions of fat bodies outside of conceptions of what a normal body should look like” (Cameron, 2019, p. 274). The blaming of fatness on physical conditions, such as PCOS, is a common way that someone can perform “good” fatty because it is a way to take the individualistic approach, such as their “bad behavior causing their fatness,” and placing it on something beyond their control.

The view that fat is something can be controlled can be particularly harmful when in conjunction with other ideas about how bodies are expected to exist. Burford & Orchard (2014) discuss this encouragement and expected desire for thinness as normativity in conjunction with the notion that “trans* people should want to be model examples of the binary gender system” (p. 61). In discussing an experience where a doctor told one of the authors that weight loss was a necessity before they were allowed to go on testosterone, they write about their expectation that medical practitioners are “supposed to know best, they were supposed to be kind, they were supposed to know how to keep us healthy” (p. 67) and they therefore went on to question their own bodily epistemology as a result. They use this moment to highlight that it is crucial for queer fat folks to reckon with their internalized phobias that result from the fact that “we live in a heterosexist/cissexist world” (p. 64). Similarly, McFarland et al (2017) discuss how weight loss and desire for thinness is associated with certain life rituals that are constructed along the notion of straight time, specifically marriage, pregnancy and death. Fat is something to fear, because if one is fat, that would preclude one from being involved in these normative rituals. As McFarland

et al (2017) write, no one wants to be the fat bride, the “risky” fat pregnant person, or the prematurely dead fat person. To be any of these things is to fail to concede to normative ideologies about temporality and lifespan; straight time.

Fat has long been associated with fear in addition to failure. Fatness is framed as an “epidemic,” which “resulted in the labeling of fat as a social problem and pathological condition that needs to be remedied” (Prohaska & Gailey, 2019, p. 3); it is a “moral panic” (Cameron, 2019, p. 264). Referring to “obesity” as an epidemic insinuates that “fatness is catching if you do not take the appropriate steps to inoculate yourself against it” (Bailey, 2010, p. 448); it is “an unprecedented threat to public health” (Cain, Donaghue & Ditchburn, 2017, p. 171). Additionally, constructing fatness as an epidemic places responsibility on people to avoid this outcome as well as the overarching fear of ending up fat.

Often, when considering the discourses surrounding blame and larger bodies, fatness gets placed into “three subthemes around culpability: irresponsible people, medicalization, and modern life” (Cain, Donaghue & Ditchburn, 2017, p. 178). All three of these areas stress onus on people to change their bodies. Irresponsible individuals refer to a neoliberal orientation to blame; a person is fat because of choices they have made, and they could take responsibility to lose weight if only they had the willpower. Medicalization refers to the common framing of fatness as the result of certain health conditions, particularly things like polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). Lastly, the idea of modern life as a source of blame for fatness comes from the idea that because of how bodies move and eat due to lifestyles and access to “good food.” As Cain et al (2017) mention, “These perspectives suggest that people have the autonomy to rise above the current situation, take charge of their health, and stop making excuses.” (p. 180). However, focusing solely on individual causes for weight gain fails to consider how “other aspects of

identity (such as race, gender, age, able-bodiedness, socioeconomic status)” (p. 185) may come into play in impacting body size.

The ableist and homophobic orientation of dominant US culture arises from fear; fear that you, too, could be “not-straight” and disabled. McRuer mentions that this fear of disability is so prevalent because “able-bodied status is always temporary, disability being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough” (p. 30). Fatphobic attitudes function similarly out of fear, as with compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness, our institutions and structures are built for people who are thinner; bodies of size are a threat to this composition. However, being fat, or queer, or disabled does not carry the same signification for every body. Rather, the overlapping and interconnectedness that these aspects of identity carry result in a different quotidian materiality (Wykes, 2014). This is where the theory of intersectionality can be a useful heuristic for understanding these differences.

In considering body size more intersectionally, Eguchi & Long (2018) look at the function of pairing fatness with femme-ness, and in their articulation, explore fatness and body size as it relates to desire. Fatness is never recognized as desirable; fatness is not deemed worthy, which prevents those who are fat (and femme and Asian) from being welcomed into the (homo)nation and rendered undesirable. Similarly to many other areas of scholarship, fat studies literature has been found lacking in its considerations of multiple intersections of identity and power, particularly in regards to sexuality and race. In fact, the first written volume to focus “specifically on the critical and political potential of queering fat embodiment” (Pausé, Wykes & Murray, 2014, p. 5) was not published until 2014. Within this text, the authors seek to call attention to the ways that “compulsory heterosexuality works to regulate fat bodies and subjects,

and how this regulation might be challenged through fat scholarship and activism” (Wykes, 2014, p. 1).

Other authors have considered fatness and queerness from a perspective a subsection of the gay men’s community (Beattie, 2014; Santoro, 2011), but again, the considerations about fat queer women are sorely lacking. Even within the *Queering Fat Embodiment* text, whiteness is the unspoken “default;” very little space in the text considers the ways that race is significant in understanding how (fat and queer) bodies are treated and read. These concerns demonstrate the need for a more intersectional perspective on understanding body size and queerness.

A critique of normativity is the consistent thread between these theories and perspectives, and what drives the connection between these theories and this dissertation topic. Through combining work within queer theory/queer of color critique, crip theory, fat studies and intersectionality, this critique of normativity can be nuanced and complicated to consider the way(s) that LBQT women experience their bodies in relation to their queer identity.

Within this chapter, I reviewed the literature on queer theory, queer of color critique, crip theory, fat studies and intersectionality. These literatures provide a foundation for conversations about the body, which is the basis for this dissertation project. In the next chapter, I will consider my methodology for this project, including my methodological framework (performance studies, critical/performative interviewing, critical reflexivity) and my preliminary research procedures.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to understand how lesbian, bisexual, queer and trans (LBQT) identified women size 1x and up engage in their embodied everyday performances of the body and identity. The following three research questions guide the investigation of this study. First, how do women size 1x and up and up everyday make sense of their LBQT identifications and their bodies in relationships to others and themselves? Second, how does intersectionality complicate LBQT women, size 1x and up's understandings of their body and performing their identity/ies everyday? Third, how do size 1x and up women navigate physical and discursive space and places? To explore these questions, I utilize a critical and performative qualitative approach to interviewing. In the following chapter I describe my methodological framework as well as the data collection procedure. Additionally, I reflect on my positionality through critical reflexivity in relation to this research and my interviewees. Lastly, I discuss ways to conduct data analysis and interpretation.

Methodological Framework

I employ a qualitative method of in-depth interview that gestures toward a critical, performative turn (Alexander, 2014; Alexander & Myers, 2010; Brayda & Boyce, 2014; Conquergood, 1985; Cresswell, 1998; Longhurst, 2014; Madison, 2012; Silverman, 2000) to answer and analyze the questions raised in this study. In utilizing this approach, it allows for, emphasis of the material, embodied, and everyday aspects of identity performance. Concurrently, I use critical reflexivity to allow for examination of both text and nonverbal interactions with the participants. Sections of transcripts are included within the body of the document to highlight significant moments through close readings that identify particular concepts or structures and placed into particular themes (i.e. desire, internalized fatphobia, white femininity, queer

community, etc.). These themes were analyzed and explicated to consider the implications they carry for LBQT women's everyday performances of body and identity.

Performance Studies. While not specifically utilizing performance as a method, I am making a gesture toward more performative ways of engaging with participants and with analysis, and thus am including this background in the methods section. Because I am considering everyday identity performance, I utilize this space to differentiate the concepts of performativity, performance, and performance studies. The concept of performativity is most closely tied to Butler (1990) where performativity is conceptualized as a “repetition of a series of stylized acts.” Butler specifically used gender to demonstrate this concept, highlighting how we perform certain acts to represent “maleness” and “femaleness.” Longhurst (2014) argues that similarly to how the concept of performativity can be applied to gender, it can be applied to fat bodies, too, since “societal expectations can prompt particular repeated behaviours in sized and shaped experiences that reinforce and/or sometimes contest—or trouble—stereotypes such as these” (p. 15). Connecting performativity with performance through the metaphor and practice of dancing, Hamera (2006) asserts that performance “is always moving;” there is not one stable definition or understanding. Langallier & Peterson (2006) provide three aspects that create a performance: it must be framed, reflexive and emergent. What that means is that there must be a contextualization or framing that helps to situate the performance, there must be reflexive engagement on the part of the performer, and the performance should be emergent, and evoke something in the audience. Langallier & Peterson (2006) also note that power is always already present in any performance, whether the performer directly attends to it or not; performances are not without political or social implication, regardless of the topic or if the performer notes these implications.

Hamera (2006) notes that performance studies comes from an interdisciplinary background, influenced by scholarship in public speaking, English, theatre, anthropology, and sociology. The influence of these disciplines is evident within the various schools/institutions' methods and approaches to performative work. Lastly, Langallier & Peterson (2006) also conceptualize performance studies as a "broad spectrum" and "umbrella" under which many works are done in the name of performance studies. This is why there is such a variety of interpretation of what counts as performance studies, or why, when attending a conference, one can see dozens of different interpretations of what a performative methodology entails. This "broad spectrum" is similar to how queer theory/ies has/have at times been conceptualized as an umbrella (Anzaldúa, 1991).

Other communication studies scholars (Alexander 2003, 2008, 2014; Calafell 2013; Eguchi, 2009, 2015, 2020; González, 2000; Gutierrez-Perez, 2015; Johnson, 2001; Johnson, 2014; LeMaster 2014) consider how the everyday mundane performances of body, self, and culture contribute to how we understand our sense of self and identity within broader macroculture. Previous work in performance studies in regards to bodies of size is typically focused on autoethnographic experiences or one single performance and typically based out of one or two specific institutions. While this is all most certainly valuable and important work, and has informed my understanding(s) on this topic, this project expands the conversation surrounding LBQT women's relationships to their bodies and their queerness. By conducting multi-region interviews, this will go beyond one autoethnography, single narrative, or solo performance. These narratives accrued from the interviews allow for a richer and more diverse engagement with the content and provides room for nuancing in different ways. I seek to

complicate the “single story” (Adichie, 2009) that we are often told about body size or queerness by providing snapshots from participants’ lives and experiences.

Interviewing. Drawing on performance studies work, an in-depth interview method engages in a dialogue, where the goal “is to bring self and other together so they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 9). This interchange allows interplay and dynamic interactions to take place between those involved in the interview, providing more freedom of discussion for participant and researcher.

Utilizing interviewing allows for the deeper consideration of bodies in relationship to research. Scholars note that interviewing demands the researcher pay close attention to the participants, working to establish rapport and comfort, and body language (Brayda & Boyce, 2014; Silverman, 2000). As Alexander (2014) notes, “Bodies demand attention, attending, attuning” (p. 1177); the body knows things (Anzaldúa, 1987). Being attentive to the body in the interview is always already important, but in a study that discusses the impact of bodies and identity, being mindful of this relationship is even more paramount. Arguably, interviewing is a performative venture already, in that the researcher is being given direct access to the participants’ experiences through their (re)telling (Silverman, 2000).

Critical Reflexivity. Because this is a critical project, engaging in critical reflexivity is a practice of ethics; there is a moral imperative to the work (Madison, 2012). The participants are real people with real lives; they do not simply represent one part of the data. This also means recognizing that this project does hold potential to influence the participants, in positive and negative ways. Talking about examples of discrimination or stigma, especially in regards to

sexual orientation and body size, could be potentially uncomfortable or triggering to the participants. It is important to recognize that potentiality and make arrangements for that possibility.

However, at the heart of it, critical reflexivity is about much more than reflection in relation to one's identity; rather, "self-reflexivity cuts you to the bone. It implicates you. Reflexivity is uncomfortable because it forces you to acknowledge that you are complicit in the perpetuation of oppression...Reflexivity has got to hurt. Reflexivity is laborious" (Jones, 2011, p. 124). Critical reflexivity is not a listing of your identities to situate where you are and claim that the work you are doing is reflexive. Jones' (2011) specification of reflexivity is important, as some previous methods of engaging critical reflexivity have often been limited in their scope of the different levels of culture as well as how researchers have failed to consider their own position in relation to others, not just their identity categories. As Calafell (2013) reminds us, reflexivity also means considering how one's voice is heard based on who they are; certain voices are more readily heard than others. In this project, in particular, I need to acknowledge and struggle with what it means for my voice to be heard, and why my voice might be more "easily" or readily accepted than some of the voices of my participants, in part due to my white privilege, educational privilege, and U.S. Americanness.

McIntosh and Hobson (2013) prompt us to remember that "reflexivity is a process" (p. 3) and within that process, it involves "a constant acknowledgement of our bodies in relation to power and difference" (p. 3). In doing so, reflexivity goes beyond simply being an ethical imperative for research but to "an overall ethic of everyday being" (p. 4). Through this everyday process, they remind us that reflexivity often involves failure; it is working with those failures and seeing them as "moments of pedagogical manifestations of alliance work" (p. 4). The

alliance building/coalitional work is what McIntosh and Hobson stress as being the vital quotidian practice in reflexively engaging with others relationally. Throughout their article, they stress the interconnection of failure to the process of reflexivity; “reflexive engagement is inseparable from failure” (p. 5).

In the vein of ethics, it is important to note the power and privilege held in my position as researcher. Ethnographic and qualitative methodologies come from colonial and exploitative backgrounds; white scholars going into communities they were not a part of, not being held accountable for their research practices, othering the community and observing participants as subjects with “zoo-like” fascination. While this is not specifically an ethnographic study, but rather performative interviewing, acknowledging the background of research, and my situated identity as a white scholar is important. As McIntosh and Hobson (2013) remind us, we need to be constantly aware of the implications of ourselves and our bodies within the work, as well as how I am using my position of power as researcher. As Longhurst (2014) mentions

Research and researchers are not easily separable. This doesn't mean that we can all assume to unproblematically know and represent ourselves but some reflection on our own complex and shifting embodiment can help materialise the notion that our subjectivities are gendered, sexual, that our skin is a particular colour, and that we are a particular body size and shape. These things cannot be separated out from our roles as researchers (pp. 14-15).

The participants in this work interact with my gendered, raced, classed, sized body, which impacts their experience within the study and what they might have felt comfortable discussing. Being cognizant of this current socio-political-historical moment in time is crucial to understanding my role, my participants' role, and the research's role within scholarship. As McIntosh and Hobson (2013) mention, failure is inherently tied into reflexivity; while I intend to do my best to be aware of the ways that my participants and I are communicating across lines of difference, I know that there are moments where I have failed in my interviews. In those

moments, it was my hope to be able to transform them into pedagogical moments of learning and growth.

Because of the complicated condition of qualitative and ethnographic methods, I need to be reflexive about my researcher role in this process. In their article, “Reflexive engagement: A white (queer) women’s performance of failures and alliance possibilities,” McIntosh and Hobson (2013) stress the importance of white women being reflexive about their positioning of themselves in their work, especially in relation to the work of women of color. They challenge the readers/audience (as this article is a write up of a performance) to consider examples of failure in their attempts at alliance building to be learning opportunities as well. I know that I have not done and will not do my reflexivity perfectly. However, providing space for those moments where I fail as opportunities for growth and learning is a way to productively engage instead of projecting my failure onto my participants or refusing to acknowledge any error(s), as either of those options would be less contributive or ethical.

One last point to mention in regards to reflexivity is the concept of “metasignification” (Madison, 2012), or “thinking about thinking.” This is important to consider during the discussion of reflexivity because the way(s) that we think about ourselves, our participants, our research, etc. affects how we act towards ourselves, our participants, our research, etc. Therefore, if I am to truly attempt to do critical, reflexive qualitative work, I need to be cognizant about my own internalized fatphobia, homophobia and conditioned racism, as well as how those phobias and isms might appear within my questioning and attitudes towards the participants and narratives. For example, when I ask the participants to discuss any shame they might have felt towards their bodies while growing up or throughout their experiences in relationships, I need to ensure that I do not project any unchecked fatphobia, or my history of religious repression onto

the participants' experiences but rather leave room for them to work through their own understandings. Being mindful of how I phrase questions is also part of this process. This notion of metasignification is vital in creating the question guide for the interviews, as I need to be aware of the implications of phrasing and whether questions are leading or not.

Data Collection

Interview. As discussed in the previous chapter, queer women of size are still othered within many different spheres of society, and in particular this study sought to look at how fatness, or being a person of size (1x and up), complicates the ways one performs, understands, and engages with one's gender and sexuality. This study endeavors to reveal some insights into the previously under-researched area of queer women of size. I utilized in-depth critical performative interviewing and critical reflexivity to invite participants to share about their experiences.

I used a dialogic style of interviewing, allowing for rapport and back-and-forth with participants, sharing my experiences and resonating with theirs. While I had structured questions that I sought answers to, I did not force participants to answer them at any particular pace. The pace was set through conversation and engagement with each participant. Throughout the interviews, I shared my own lived-experience with the issues brought up by the questions, giving space for camaraderie and rapport. As several participants noted at some point during their interview, they do not get presented with many opportunities to have these sorts of discussions. The lack of discussion was part of my drive in selecting this as a research topic, and it was affirming to be able to have those conversations with the participants.

The questions that guided the interviews are listed in Appendix C at the end of this document for reference. Again, while the questions were asked of every participant, sometimes

the order was different, and follow-up questions were asked due to how participants answered the questions. In the following section, I discuss how the interviewees were approached and how I engaged with them.

As mentioned earlier, I separated the interview questions into four different areas: subjective identity position, others' reactions on identity performance, body size and intersectionality, and other questions. In the first area, subjective identity performance, I asked my participants to describe who they saw themselves as, how they fit into mainstream US LGBTQ culture, how they understood their sexuality, queerness, and gender performance as well as who and what kinds of bodies they are attracted to.

Next, I asked participants to discuss how they thought others would describe who they are, as well as how others would react to their identity performance and body. The purpose of this section was to reflect on how the context of relationality influences sense of self and community. Again, as in the first section, I asked participants to think about how others would see where they fit into broader cultural contexts, how others would describe their sexuality and gender performance, as well as how others, both in and out of the queer community, would describe their body.

In the third section, body size and intersectionality, I asked participants more specifically about how they navigate the world in relation to their body size, as well as all other aspects of their identity. This section was where most participants got more nuanced and went farther in their answers, especially after considering some of the parts of them in the two previous sections. Additionally, I asked participants to discuss challenges in dating, intimate relationships, in body size, in queer community and in desire. This was where a lot of fruitful conversation and narrative arose from.

Lastly, at the end of the interview I asked participants if there was any advice that they had for other LBQT women in regards to their body as well as anything else they felt was missing from the conversation. By the time we had reached the end of the interview, many of the participants had said what they wanted to, but were also happy to offer advice or suggestions, usually around seeking other larger bodies to learn from, education, and self-acceptance. Overall, there were many times in which the participants naturally brought up answers to the questions that were on the interview guide, and so the conversation flowed fairly naturally instead of like a survey with answers to be filled in. Participants were able to respond to the questions fairly easily, and most seemed fairly comfortable throughout the process.

Interviewees. To recruit participants, I used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007). This strategy for recruitment was fitting for this population as I needed participants who would be able to deepen the understanding of the research questions as well as a specific subset of the population that fit the research criteria. As this was a critical, qualitative study, the function of this research is not to provide generalizations, but to offer a snapshot into the perspectives and narratives of those who participated in the study, and to shed a light on a section of the population that is often under-studied in a positive way (versus the “obesity epidemic” framing that bodies of size are often put into).

Again, the criteria that was asked of participants to fill was that interviewees must be 18 years and older, wear US clothing size 1x or up, and identify as at least one of the following: lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer. A total of eight LBQT women participated in this study, and due to the relatively small size of the participant group, more depth and attention was able to be given to each individual analysis of transcribed narrative. Additionally, as this is a

qualitative study, the point is not to have a large population, but rather to allow for more nuance and complication in the select cases that are involved (McCracken, 1988).

Prior to beginning each interview, I confirmed with each participant that it was okay to audio-record our conversation. I read the script that was emailed to each participant informing them of the goals of the project, potential risks and rewards, and how to contact me for future information if they had questions about the project or their participation. Due to the sensitive nature of the conversations, I had requested a waiver of written informed consent from the IRB, so I did not require a signature. This is partly because not everyone is able to be out; for one of my participants, if her boss knew about her queerness she could be fired. However, I did make sure to ask the participants if they were okay with participating following the reading of the previously stated content. Each participant consented verbally to this and to my audio-recording for the purpose of data analysis.

Due to specifications from the IRB, each participant was assigned a study code number, which in this case ended up being a number from 1-8 (so referred to as Participant 1, for example). Originally, I had suggested that participants would choose a pseudonym for use within the document, however, this choice was not supported by the IRB. The rationale behind the use of study code numbers over pseudonyms was that if a participant chose a pseudonym that was too close to their actual name, it would give away their anonymity. If that were to happen, then the purpose of a request for waiver of written consent would be nullified. Therefore, study code numbers were deemed the appropriate compromise.

Interviews were conducted in person at the Communication & Journalism building on the University of New Mexico Albuquerque campus or through video chat platforms (including facetime, Facebook video chat, skype, and zoom). The interviews were conducted from

September through December of 2019, and each lasted an average of 73 minutes, ranging from 51:55 – 1:50:48. Six of the participants identified as white, one as biracial, and another as Black. The represented a variety of ages, with four of the participants in their 20s, 2 in their 30s, and 2 in their 40s. All but one of the participants identified with bisexuality in some way. Two participants identified as genderqueer. The participants represented various regions in the United States (one from the Northeast, one from the Midwest, one from the South, one from the Mountain region, two from the Southwest, two from the West coast) as well as my own perspective having grown up in the Northeast, living in the Midwest and now in the Southwest.

In asking participants to explore their everyday embodied performances of their queerness in relation to their body (size), the questions that were asked were formulated to provide insight into moments that might not be asked in other formats, and again, particularly in more positive ways than much of the broader macrocultural research and conversation about larger bodies. For example, take the everyday performance of a fat body publically ordering and eating food as discussed in Jones (2014). She “explores the categorization of fat embodiment. Tensions around the ‘fat’ body reveal its status as a particular kind of sign that makes classed, sexualised, and racialised bodies, and as a signifier that amplifies the (dis)connection between material bodies and heteronormative white-supremacist capitalist desire” (31). Jones stresses the importance of considering fat within the context of social performance, because doing so allows us to “understand the manifesting materiality of bodies as receptors or resisters of capitalist, racist, and heteronormative desires” (32). She discusses the importance of fat as a sign, and how calling someone “fat” cannot be refuted like other insults, and so this insult becomes a performance with the fat person as the performer and the insulter as the audience. This makes the fat person “forced” to respond in some way, however “...the (fat) body is never not at ‘risk’ for

performing fat” (34). Madison (2005) reminds us that these small performances may not create a sweeping change, but rather can function as an accumulation of resistance. Morris & Sloop (2006) also remind us that for some bodies, everyday acts, such as men publically kissing other men, functions as a performance of resistance. Koppers (2001) also notes that for fat performers, they are always already read with their body being hyper-present; “the fat performer does not escape her physicality” (281); regardless of what the performance is about, their fatness will always already be read as a part of it. It is this consideration of being hyper-present that leads me to posit that there are specific ontological expectations for queer women of size’s bodies and the ways that they embody their identities and the expectations of their identities.

There is also an aspect of this project that arises from my own need to provide myself, and for others who experience the world similarly, space to voice our understanding(s) of daily experience(s) of self, body, and sexuality. As a queer and as a fat woman, sometimes meaning is ascribed to your body regardless of your choice, in particular, when it comes to sexuality. From the misinformed accusation that I “must be a lesbian because I’m too fat to get a man,” to the completely problematic, “you should be lucky someone found you attractive enough to be raped,” my queer fat body is always the subject of discussion, disgust, or disbelief. Again, my experience is not isolated or unique; fat bodies are constantly seen as an acceptable site of public commentary. Because of this, bodies of size (and queer bodies) are not always given the same freedom of expression or praise that thinner (and straighter) bodies are. I wanted to provide a space for participants to be able to, if they so choose, provide a holistic picture of their self beyond bodies and gender expression without being problematically intersectional. Rather I wanted to have a space for participants to be multidimensional people and define themselves in their own words.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

After completing the interviews with the participants, I compiled transcriptions of those interviews, noting significant moments during, and mined them for concepts and themes. Each transcript was read through multiple times to familiarize myself with the narratives of each participant. Following this, I reviewed the concepts, themes and narratives through the lenses of queer and crip theories and fat studies.

Because the purpose of this study is to understand everyday sense making around bodies and performances of identity, specifically gender, sexuality and body size, it was conducive to analyze the interviews via specific themes. As I read through the transcripts from each interview, I marked where certain sections of discussion were fitting to certain themes as well as sections that might be cross-fitting in several themes. I looked for hidden assumptions along the lines of privilege, whiteness, and internalized homophobia and fatphobia. Through this process I also considered the ways that my own perspective, experiences, and hidden assumptions were present and operating during the interviews and analysis. Following transcription, I began to sort the data according to themes along the lines of my research questions and the ways that hierarchies, systems of power and ideologies were implicated in their responses to the questions. After the initial coding of the interviews, I went back and re-read them to allow for more nuance and to make connections between the stories that were shared in each of the eight interviews.

Through this process, three larger themes emerged. The first theme, *Intersections of Fatphobia and Queerness*, concerns the ways that many aspects of fatness and queerness intersect, particularly around the notions of desire, queer community, and complications of what fat embodiment means, especially in regards to multiplicative layers of identity. The second theme, *Whiteness and Privilege*, considers how white femininity functions invisibly in many of

the interviews, how aspects of privilege come into play with understanding and performing of identity and self, and the way(s) that fatphobia can be internalized. The third and final theme, *Everyday Identity Performance*, examines how the notion of failure is tied into everyday performances of self, particularly along the lines of queerness, how queerness is relationally understood, and queerness as a political choice.

The longest discussion occurs in the first theme, *Intersections of Fatphobia and Queerness*, particularly along the lines of desire and body. As mentioned earlier, since many of the participants are not given space to talk about these issues freely, my thought is that because of the context of the space, particularly one that was not judgmental about larger bodies and desire, participants felt able to discuss how they felt. There were many rich examples about desire of their bodies, other bodies, how they felt when other people desired them, and this felt simultaneously incredibly fulfilling and disheartening, as I will elaborate more on in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I focus my analysis on the eight interviews I conducted with self-identified Lesbian-Bisexual-Queer-Transgender (LBQT) women over the age of 18 who wear clothing size 1x and up. These interviews were conducted in person or through video chat (Facetime, Facebook video, skype, zoom) over the course of September through December of 2019 and each lasted an average of 73 minutes ranging from 51:55 – 1:50:48. Participants were asked a series of 39 questions, plus any spontaneous questions that arose organically, over four areas: subjective identity position, other's reactions on identity performance, body size and intersectionality, and other questions. Throughout the interviews, as well as in reflection with my own experience, similar experiences and themes arose that address my research questions concerning everyday sense making around bodies and identity, intersectionality, and space-making.

For my presentation of the data, I will be categorizing the analysis into the three following larger themes: 1) Intersections of fatphobia and queerness, 2) whiteness and privilege, and 3) everyday identity performance. In the first theme, *Intersections of Fatphobia and Queerness*, I look at how fatphobia and queerness interact with each other through discussions on desire, queer community, and complicating of fat embodiment. In the second theme, *Whiteness and Privilege*, I explore how participants' discussion (or lack of discussion) about whiteness, racism, white privilege and white supremacy contributes to their articulated understanding of how their bodies move in the world, particularly noting how white femininity can blanket some of the experiences that women of size may have in terms of acceptance, safety and navigating the world. I also consider how degrees of fatness impacts the privilege, or lack thereof, bodies of size may experience in spaces and relationships, and how internalized

fatphobia is not isolated from how other systems of oppression function. In the third theme, *Everyday Identity Performance*, I consider how participants' performances of self and identity, through aesthetic, relational, and political choices at times is rendered a (queer) failure or success and how notions of what "counts" as "queer enough" impact sense of self, relationships and community.

Below, I utilize some of the deep examples that arose from the interviews. While there were a broad variety of topics covered in each interview, a common theme from all of the participants was difficulty in articulating and understanding their identity performance and reception as queer women of size due to the multiplicity of the intersecting components of their selves. While a lot of the answers to the questions were as I expected, based on my own subjectivity and lived experience as a queer fat woman, there was less discussion of medical fatphobia or discrimination than I had expected. I had hoped that topic would arise organically for the participants, hence I did not specifically ask a question about health contexts, since that was not directly related to my research questions, but it did not come up as much as I had anticipated.

However, the topics and discussions that did arise during the interviews proved fruitful and engaging, and several participants expressed gratitude for being able to even talk about these aspects of their self and understanding, as they/we often have few avenues to do so. For me as well, being able to have conversations on these topics was simultaneously saddening, validating and encouraging. Having the opportunity to share space with folks who can more readily relate to a myriad of my life experiences helped me to feel seen, but it was also disheartening. Hearing the same or similar experiences eight times over and being able to echo and relate to those experiences myself just strengthened the knowledge that the way(s) fatphobia and homophobia

operate are structurally driven and carry everyday material consequences. Particularly, in the discussions around dating and desire, hearing that others had similar experiences in those realms helped me to not feel as alone, but also discouraged, because it doesn't seem to be changing any time quickly. For example, when participants discussed the difficulties in finding partners who were not fatphobic as a consistent issue for them, I felt less alone in that experience, but more frustrated at how broad this problem actually is. However, my hope is that in increasing conversations around these concerns, we will more readily be able to engage with sharing and solutions that might be able to address these difficulties.

It was also refreshing to have the chance to share epistemologies around how we relate to the world as larger bodies under the queer umbrella; but I often left the conversations saddened that I do not readily have a large fat community with which to traverse the quotidian. Often many of my participants and I are the largest person/people in the room and that can be a weighty task to bear; navigating space, work, romantic relationships, public transportation, interpersonal engagements, medical settings and so on as a larger body can be taxing. While not explicitly mentioned by many of the participants, the sentiment undergirded parts of the conversation where the real loneliness of being the largest person in your community can take a toll on one's body.

Intersections of Fatphobia and Queerness

In this section I consider the three small subthemes within the broader theme of intersections of fatphobia and queerness: 1) Fatness and desire, 2) fatness and queer community, and 3) complicating fat embodiment. Through these themes I consider the ways that fat sexuality and desire are often discussed in very specific ways (othering/fetishizing) or not mentioned at all, the ways that fatness impacts the queer community and vice versa, and other complicating

aspects of fatness, such as travel, healthcare, and physical belonging. I begin this section with fatness and desire, as it was often from this point that other conversations were spurred elsewhere or returned. Many people of size are not given the opportunity to talk about their desires; As participants noted, “we don’t talk about it,” and so when given an opportunity to do so, many participants took advantage of the space to do so at length.

Fatness and Desire. Nearly every participant echoed a similar experience while discussing their involvements dating or seeking out intimate partners. Between negotiating their own internalized fatphobia and others’ internalized/externalized fatphobia, dating and seeking intimate and/or sexual connections is often seen as a struggle. Some of these struggles involve body image, feeling comfortable in one’s body, feeling attractive to self and others, especially due to media messages that infer larger bodies are a failure or a source of disgust, (lack of) representation of fat bodies as attractive, and suspicion of thinner bodies. Desire was a potent topic for discussion, partly because folks of size are not asked about it often, and for folks who are interested in engaging in sexual intimate relationships, thinking about their body in relation to desire and to others becomes central.

One of the more common discussions that arose when asked about intimate relationships was the issue that several participants framed as suspicion of thin(ner) folks’ motives, especially in regards to what bodies are seen as romantically and sexually desirable. For example, one participant articulated in detail her struggle with folks who claim to be okay with fat people, but then don’t follow through in their dating and sexual actions:

... if you’re not still actually swiping on fat people or like going on a date with a fat person, I don’t actually believe that you don’t want fats, like it’s not a fucking preference. It is specifically you saying that fatness is not desirable. And I will never believe anybody who says “I just, I don’t know, I’ve just never been able to date a fat person.” It’s like “Nah, no, I don’t believe it.” I don’t believe that you’re only into twinks. I don’t believe that you only need to touch rock hard bodies to

find love. I don't, I can't believe that. And I'm suspicious. I am highly suspicious of people who have only had thin partners (Participant 3)

In this excerpt, Participant 3, who identifies as a queer fat femme is discussing how often the phrase “no fats” either explicitly gets added into dating profiles or ends up appearing in other subtle ways, such as the commonly referenced notion of preferences, which has long been utilized to justify people's lack of attraction to many folks who fall outside of the mythic white hegemonic center, and to dismiss personal responsibility for the ways desire becomes socially formed and conditioned. They articulate the notion that also sometimes people will claim to be okay with fat people, or state their interest in dating fat people, but if there is no action behind this claim, then they believe this to be simply lip service and not actual effort, leading to distrust; words without praxis render this supposed allyship empty.

I have also seen, or heard, from so-called “allies” in the queer community. Often this is not an explicit statement saying, “I'm not attracted to fat bodies,” though I have heard that from time to time. Usually the way that this might come up with friends occurs in the way they continually describe the people they find attractive. If we are swiping on dating apps together, and they continually swipe left on the larger folks, and continuously swipe right on more stereotypically attractive (thinner) folks, then I can logically come to the conclusion that they are clearly not interested in fat people. If I call this to their attention that they are only swiping on one particular kind of person, they bring up the idea that it is their preference and they “can't help who they're attracted to.” Unless I have seen someone with a larger partner, I often have suspicion about what they think of my body, even as a friend. I am suspicious, and doubt that thinner folks are operating from a place of compassion about my body.

Participant 2 also echoes this doubt of thinner folks but considers it from the perspective of suspicion of thinner folks who *are* swiping right on her body. However, she does consider that her perspective on it could perhaps be restrictive.

...I feel most comfortable when like, dating or like, having sex with people whose bodies are more like mine. So, like, when I've been like, on dating apps and stuff, I'm really suspicious of people who have like, swiped like, right on me, so like, you know, showed interest in me, that have like, a lot of stuff in their bio about like, "looking for a gym partner" kind of thing and who are super fit and like ripped and stuff. Because I have had experiences with people like that, you know, sending rude messages and stuff. And so, I tend to kind of not look at people who are like that and which is, you know, could be limiting because maybe they aren't like that.

Similar to Participant 3's reference to the ways that dating profiles can have coded messages, Participant 2 highlights the phrase of "looking for a gym partner," which can also function as another way of subtly saying "no fats." This sort of codification operates under the notion that fat bodies do not go to the gym or are not active/interested in being active and is a way for people to not appear as obviously fatphobic. The idea that fat bodies are not "fit" is a fallacy that gets pushed forward from the medical industrial complex and infiltrates daily interactions with fat bodies. Stating that someone is seeking a "fit" partner can also accomplish a similar effect. Again, since they are not explicitly stating "no fats," they can't be called out for explicit fatphobia, even if it is there. In that context, Participant 2's dismissal of these sort of folks on dating apps is not without precedent, as she mentions. Many, if not all, people of size who engage on dating apps experience explicit fatphobia through direct messages, such as directly making negative comments about one's body, insinuating they are not worth the space they take up, et cetera. Based in those experiences, which are examples from my own experiences with online dating, it makes sense to utilize that prior experience to avoid further similar interactions and simply just not engaging with thinner folks from the start.

Again, this distrust of thinner folks is not without precedent. For many, it is the notion of surveillance and judgement from thinner bodies that may have led to verbal or physical discriminatory experiences that furthers this lack of trust. I can only be called a “fat bitch” so many times by thinner folks before I operate from a place of distrust to prevent further hurt. Even being around thinner people in general, and not solely for sexual/intimate relationships, some resonated with that constant questioning of thinner folks’ motives:

When I hang out with really skinny people, I’m always wondering, what are they thinking about me? What should I order? Like, I think about what am I going to order to eat. Like, there’s so much. And then when especially when they start getting on, like they’re, “Oh this is what’s wrong with my body,” tangents, I’m like, it’s like a shrink. But I don’t shrink. It’s like I both simultaneously shrink and expand. (Participant 6).

For this participant, the hyperawareness of their size becomes more apparent when around thinner folks. In particular, they worry about how smaller folks might judge what they’re going to eat and then how those same folks might view those food choices as the reason for their larger size, especially when those folks discuss the various things they perceive as being “wrong” with their body. Because food consumption (read: “unhealthy” food consumption) is so often correlated to “obesity,” the judgement for food choices when in public is real.

Participant 6, who identified as queer, disabled and Jewish, also discussed how when they go out with their dad, the servers always bring him the regular coke and them the diet coke, when they were the one that ordered the regular. Because of stories like this, in a couple of the interviews, I brought up my own experience with “unintentional” fat shaming in restaurants that I often experience with food in public. This topic naturally arose and was a place to establish some camaraderie, as the struggle being a fat body eating visibly in public is something that many struggle with. Specifically, I mentioned how if I am at dinner with someone and one of the people at the table has ordered a salad, they always bring me the salad, or attempt to bring me the

salad, regardless of what I ordered. When I shared this story, the participants nodded, laughed, rolled their eyes in commiseration, and were able to relate to this experience as well. Participant 3 talked about how they slowly realized this was not inane behavior:

And I used to not really think anything about it, because I used to just be like, “Oh, whatever, the person, you know is busy. Like how could they maybe know all their different clients or all their different customers?” But I definitely now realize that like, “Oh, so you think I need to eat this salad. Thank you for telling me that.”

Beyond concerns about judgement for food choices, other participants framed this as anxiety, particularly around being the only fat person in a space. Additionally, concerns about how one’s body will/won’t fit into a space and constant staring are all contexts where thinner folks don’t experience the world in the same way. If you’ve never had to worry about if you’ll be able to fit into a seat at a performance venue or a restaurant, or ending up with bruises on your thighs because you’ve been forced to sit in a chair that was not designed with your body in mind, or had people automatically make assumptions about your health because of your body, you don’t experience the world in the same way as people of size. Because of this lack of embodied knowledge, and often a lack of interest to even seek out that knowledge, bodies of size understandably may operate from a place of distrust. For many folks of size, the number of folks who embody thin privilege who do work to unpack their fatphobia and assumptions about bodies is so small that it is easier to simply operate from a place of distrust because it might lead to less harm and hurt. In other words, very few thin people have checked their privilege, and so we assume that thin folks will hurt us or at the very least hold prejudiced views.

This sentiment is even stronger when considering thinner folks as longer-term romantic partners in addition to sexual partners. One participant mentioned even skimming through a potential partner’s social media to see if they had any previous fat partners and said that, “I’m

deeply comforted if there are” (Participant 4). For her, this seeking of comfort stems from engaging with past partners who did not appear to be as inclusive as they claimed to be.

Fatphobia will become quickly apparent when someone is engaging with a naked fat body:

And I’ve had people who think really negative things about fat people present in a positive way until they got naked with my body. And it’s scary to be naked and vulnerable with somebody and have them saying horrible things about fat people in a way that they think honors us. And it’s, and I’ve like, gotten to the point I have no qualms about ending things in the middle... I’ll do things like, if I’m hot for someone I’ll, you know, look at their Facebook or Instagram or look at their old partners and see if there are any fat people. I’m deeply comforted if there are...

This idea of looking through a potential relational partner’s social media prior to dating is not uncommon, and for many bodies of size, this anxiety about thinner partners comes from prior experiences with thinner bodies that do not know how to engage with bodies that are larger than them. As highlighted in the above segment, sometimes folks will say what seems to be “the right words,” and then they either engage with a fat body in a vulnerable way (such as sexually) and are unable to hide their disgust or fatphobia any longer. It is hard to disguise your fatphobia (for self and others) when you’re in a vulnerable place if you’re not genuinely working to unpack it. In other words, fake fat acceptance will be overwhelmingly apparent if you are naked with a fat body. For many fat folks and folks of size, simply being naked around another person is an extremely vulnerable act. This is not to dismiss anxiety that thinner bodies may also have, as nudity is typically a vulnerable act in our current societal construction. For fat bodies, being naked means setting yourself up for so many different potential avenues of rejection. Participant 4 recognized the importance of that vulnerability. She has gotten to a point where she has learned from experience and self-work that she does not have to put up with mediocre engagements or people who simply tolerate her body.

Throughout our conversations about (fat) bodies and sex, it was very apparent that she was both passionate about this issue, and had done that work to see herself as valuable and worthy of positive sexual interactions with others. Her voice sped up and varied in pitch, her body language was open and engaged, and she was clearly excited to be able to talk about this with someone who might come closer to understanding her perspective than thinner folks in the queer community. Later in the interview she elaborates more:

Yeah, although I will say when my partners are on the spectrum of body that is seen as conventionally attractive, I tend to have more insecurity, and that I have a lot of insecurity around my body with partners. And I can do a bunch of work, and it's still something that exists and still something that's there and that I live in a culture that tells me all day long, every day, my body is wrong. And so, I actively seek out partners who will worship my body. And that worshipping my body is something that I am very eroticized by and that I am even at a point where I'm like, maybe I require that, you know?

Here Participant 4 highlights how strongly internalized fatphobia can be, even when you're aware of it and working on it, and that's because of messages and interpersonal interactions that confirm, "my body is wrong." The notion of having partners who either just tolerate a fat body, or who don't know how to engage with a fat body, or even acknowledging a fat body, particularly if the partner is thinner or more "conventionally attractive," is something that a couple of the interviewees brought up. In bringing up the trope of "You're not fat, you're beautiful," Participant 3 discusses how this often tells them everything they need to know about how that partner might engage with them relationally:

...if a person, a partner, a potential date says, "You're not fat, you're beautiful," I immediately want to leave them in the dust, because what they're saying is that they believe the connotation of fat equaling ugly or fat equaling undesirable, and so now they want to tell me like, they don't believe that's true because I'm beautiful. Whatever. So, like, if a partner says that, then I'm immediately uninterested and also... when I think about relationships, I really think about, you know, can I trust them?

Again, as with discussions of preferences and gym partner language that might be used, the phrase “You’re not fat, you’re beautiful,” is another commonly referenced phrasing that many people (especially women) of size experience. But as Participant 3 highlights above, what is undergirded in that statement is the “connotation of fat equaling ugly or fat equaling undesirable.” Because fat is so often constructed as undesirable, both for being on our own bodies and for being with a body who is fat, people are not often exposed to larger bodies having and being seen as pleasurable. Because of that, Participant 3 also mentions the significant physical differences that are involved with sex and pleasuring larger bodies, and if someone holds views that do not see fat as desirable, or they have not engaged with larger bodies before, that is a kind of labor and engagement with their body they are not interested in.

I do not trust thin partners because I feel like they’re going to look at my body and they’re going to like, maybe in their head they’re thinking, “I know exactly how to pleasure this person.” But then, when they see the different layout of a fat body, I think they’re like, “Oh, I no longer know what to do.” But instead of admitting that, “I’m just going to play around and see what feels good,” but it doesn’t feel good at all, you know?

This participant highlights how a lack of communication around sexual desires can intersect with fatphobia or even just ignorance in how others interact with fat bodies. This assuming of similarity and dismissing of difference in bodies may lead to dissatisfaction and reinforcing of traumatic past experiences as well as lack of enjoyment and pleasure. This may not necessarily be because a partner is fatphobic; this lack of communication could also be because a thinner person is unsure how to bring up issues around body size and sex in a way that doesn’t harm their partner or make them seem prejudiced. Participant 3 also brings up that for many, the idea that they’ve seen BBW porn leads them to assume they will know what a fat body will look like naked, but that bodies are all individual and someone may not know how to engage with the landscape of a larger body.

However, this is not solely an issue of not communicating effectively with one's partner, but also about how bodies are valued and whose bodies are valued. Participant 4, who identifies as a queer, fat, lesbian/dyke in her 40s mentions that the bigger her body gets, the less play she gets. She says

But I know that a lot of fat folks rarely get sexualized for attention or fucked and that, that is true for me as well. But like that, like it, it, and it starts to feel like there's something wrong with me. Because the values of the community say that there's room for all of us, but if, when my body is bigger, I get less play, it mirrors heteronormative culture in this, in this pervasive, silent way. And I have definitely experienced that. And I will straight up say my body changes shape at times. And when I weigh less, I get more ass. And that is, that is not that this body deserves less ass, and it's not, and it's not that you know, but it's, it's irritating as fuck and we don't talk about it.

This was a place of connection for Participant 4 and I. Through moments like this, it was easy to establish a rapport with the participants, and in particular Participant 4. Because our conversation was so natural, I often forgot that I had questions to ask, as we ended up chatting about the topics that I had planned to bring up in the interview question guide. In this moment during our conversation, I mentioned that I noticed, as my body has gotten bigger, the amount of people interested in me has definitely gone down as well. We commiserated on how frustrating this is for larger bodies.

However, Participant 4 also points out another concern that arose for several participants: fat sex and sexuality. Fatness is often positioned on a binary of abjection to fetishization, and this framing affects how women of size experience sexual intimacy and attraction/attractiveness. Often, fatter bodies are not considered "hot" or "fuckable; instead of being seen as having agentic control over desire and attractiveness, fat bodies are labeled as "glorifying obesity." As highlighted above, "we don't talk about it," which further places the subject in a silent or taboo context. In this above-mentioned section from Participant 4, she also emphasizes that this lack of

play makes it “feel like there’s something wrong with me” especially when she sees thinner lesbians getting more play. When those are the messages, explicit or not, that are being directed at fat bodies, it makes sense that it tends to be a less discussed topic since it often gets relegated to the realm of the taboo.

Additionally, elsewhere in the interview when talking about the values of queer community, she talks about the notion that everyone is welcome, which she nods at in this portion, but that it doesn’t actually pan out that way when the same (thin) bodies are getting sexualized and valued; “we all like the same five girls,” who tend to be masculine-of-center, thinner, and white. I mentioned to her that even when I was thinner, I wasn’t queer or masculine presenting, and so I have never experienced being that queer “object of desire.” Because her gender expression has shifted, she has experienced moments of that attraction, but as a fat femme dyke, she often doesn’t experience it in the same way anymore. To her, this obsession with this “same” girl is a reflection of dominant heteronormative culture, as well as the hypocrisy and signaling to some of the work that needs to be done within the queer community in regard to body diversity and acceptance.

...it’s not always like this, but that, that frequently there’s a very specific hierarchy of what’s attractive and we’re frequently all drawn to the same people. And it’s dumb. We should change it, you know? So, and then, you know, you know, I would like more folks to join me in the pursuit of actually trying to find compatibility, you know? But yeah, I think that, you know, and I would like more people to be into fat chicks (Participant 4).

In this passage, she hints at how often these same more hegemonically attractive folks get more play and more attention based on their physical appearance, which does not always translate to compatibility; people pursue hotness over good fit in a relationship. This is nothing new, or not limited to the queer women’s community by any means, but is still of concern, especially in communities that tout themselves as progressive and inclusive. She elaborated

further when talking about performative allyship, desire and dating: “Left on all fat chicks, but at the same, but they won’t write, “No fat chicks,” you know? But they literally never, ever, ever, ever, ever and I’m like, “I’ve seen you date 100 people.” You know? So, I think that in queer community there’s less obvious fatphobia.”

Because there are challenges that need to be addressed within the queer community, the participants were asked about how they experienced any challenges to being queer and a person of size (along with their other identities). Something echoed by many participants was the notion that finding partners who are not fatphobic tends to be the biggest challenge, particularly in an already small(er) community such as the queer (women’s) community. On the same token, there was some discussion about being “health-trolled” by thinner queer folks or framing their lack of attraction as a “preference,” as discussed earlier. Others expressed the lack of desirability their bodies face, as well as not wanting their larger presence to be something that would be rendered scary to a woman they were trying to hit on, due to the masculinizing of larger bodies:

I think that often times when I think about me like, in a club, if I were to go hit on somebody I feel worried that like, being fat and queer is an extra threat, like more predatory. Like, I feel just big and kind of scary in that sense that like maybe they think I’m coming on as a predator... And that’s what I’ve felt like, at a club multiple times, because I tend to be the person that people dance on, which signals to me that I’m like the bigger, the masc person in the relationship and they’re forcing that identity onto me. So, then I feel worried, like, okay, should I not touch them here? Should I not do this? Should I not say this? Because I’m already masculine and big in this situation and I don’t want to exhibit toxic masculinity. I don’t want to exhibit masculinity and all the ways that it is wrong as being like a predator.

In this moment, Participant 3 mentions how often larger bodies get associated with masculinity, toxic masculinity and potentially predatory behavior. For them, this reading of their body affects who they feel they can approach and how they feel they can approach other bodies, such as in a club situation. During this conversation, I mentioned how that often plays out for me in terms of

people assuming that I am the more dominant one in the relationship (top); the larger body, often getting masculinized, gets placed into the top position. This is not always an accurate representation for all fat folks. However, this assumption that fat bodies are the top/dominant/masculinized body affects how fat (queer) bodies are engaged with or approached.

This constant (over)thinking is something that many of my participants articulated in their interviews. The thinking and self-reflection were apparent in several of the interviews; it was clear that this was not the first time these folks had thought about these issues, but rather was just one of the first times they were able to fully articulate these thoughts out loud to another person. One of the most poignant moments was in the interview with Participant 4, when we discussed this very question around being queer and a person of size. She elaborates,

...I feel insecure about my body with sexual partners and sometimes will be overgenerous or diminish my needs in an effort to feel wanted or attractive or valuable, that I will earn my value through my personality or my value through what I can do, that I can fuck like a champ. But the idea that my worth and my sexuality is inherently valuable is something that I'm working towards, and I think it is specifically related to having a fat body and that it feels like an exception to the rule if someone is attracted to my body, that then someone can be attracted to me. And I still don't believe that they are attracted to my body... in actuality, like, it, frequently people are attracted to me and not attracted to my body. And that's shitty. And so, I think that it's hard for me to believe that somebody is hot for me

Participant 4 stresses how many folks of size feel the need to be more attentive to their partners, or to not ask for attention to their body and needs, because people who are willing to sleep with larger bodies seem to be a rarity. It's another instance in where oxymoronically fat bodies fear taking up too much space. As mentioned above, "it feels like an exception to the rule if someone is attracted to my body." It was at this point in the interview with her where I almost cried, both from relief that someone understood my experience, and the pain that someone also experienced similar things to me. Feeling genuinely desired by someone is not unique to a fat or larger body

experience, but it is something that was continuously mentioned throughout all of the interviews. I shared with her how I struggle with this in terms of even making the choice to swipe right on people who I consider too “attractive” to be into me because “it feels like an exception to the rule if someone is attracted to my body.” We commiserated on this, noting that this disbelief that a partner finds us attractive does not mainly arise from our sense of self-worth, but rather is informed by our understanding of the structural ways that fatphobia and body shame operate.

Because of the messages that fat bodies are given, as well as prior experiences, many folks of size enter a sexual relationship with the idea that people are not really attracted to them, or alternatively, that their sexuality is the only thing valuable about them. Fat folks also rarely receive compliments or consensual objectification in the same ways that thinner bodies do, and so when someone does express a desire or attraction to one’s body, this can sometimes be shocking. This also may have arisen due to the fact that most of my participants are survivors of trauma and were socialized as women. Particularly for women survivors of trauma there is often a significant struggle to understand one’s worth outside of and within one’s body after traumatic experiences. Complicating this with fatness often presents a challenge for women of size to be present in their bodies with partners. Even when presented with evidence, such as a partner expressing that they are attracted to their body, it is hard for Participant 4 (and myself) to believe that, because of prior experiences that seem to trump the few experiences that are more positive.

Because body image and body reception can be so complicated for larger bodies, this puts fat sex in an interesting position. Participant 4 identifies as a sexuality educator and owns a feminist sex shop. She spends a significant amount of time discussing the topic of sex, and consequently fat sex. I spent the most time with her of all the participants, almost two hours, during which she elaborated at length on her thoughts. As mentioned earlier, I found it extremely

easy to talk with her, and we had more of a conversation than a rigidly guided interview. Besides Participant 4, Participant 3 was the most vocal about fat bodies and fat sex. When discussing the notion of how different her body looks from the bodies that most people see in porn, she talks about how that expectation of what her body looks like can lead to confusion and disappointment, especially in terms of physical differences from thinner bodies, especially if she is their first fat body experience:

And I don't ever want to feel like I need to apologize to my body. And so, I need to know that like, the partner that I'm with isn't going to think I need to apologize. I also feel like fat bodies like, you know, my areolas are huge. My nipples point to the ground. Like, I have a FUPA. I, you know, maybe my labias are thicker than the labias you've seen before. So, like, I might need you to dig deeper. Like it could be any sort of thing. Like, I need you ultimately to know that, like me telling you these things is because I also want to be sexually pleased. I don't want to continue to have interactions where I'm worried or invested in pleasuring the person, but not the other way around, Like, I want to be pleased, too, and sometimes the way that I please you isn't the way that I want to be pleased or isn't pleasing me.

This discussion was significant to me, as a fat person and a researcher, because it was a topic I didn't even bring up explicitly in the questions with participants due to my own insecurities about particular aspects of fat embodiment. They were able to bring up aspects of a fat experience that I could relate to but had been unable to put into words, both out of fear I might be alone in that articulation, and fear that talking so openly about fat sex would make the participants uncomfortable. However, several participants did bring up their own insecurities about fatness and sex. Body anxiety and not feeling comfortable to explore their queerness because of their bodies was a common theme, and definitely a place where I could relate to my participants as well. Participant 2, who is white and was raised in the Southern United States, mentioned that because of where she was raised and the religion that she was exposed to, she was unable to fully explore her queerness in ways that she wanted, in addition to being a larger

body that is more femme presenting. Participant 6 mentions feeling more anxiety as they have gotten larger: “The larger I have gotten, the more insecure I have become about sex, like what do I look like naked, what do parts of me look like moving? How is my partner going to experience that? Has she lost her attraction?” When fat sex was brought up in the interviews, how the potential or current partner would view one’s body was fairly central to the discussion, especially when it came to how one’s body would look to one’s partner.

Participant 3 also brings up an important concept in the above quoted section, the notion of not apologizing for one’s body. A few participants made reference to Sonya Renee Taylor’s germinal text, *The Body is Not an Apology*, and the idea that one should not have to live in a constant state of apology for the way one’s body looks and takes up space; one has not done anything wrong by having a body and there is no need to seek forgiveness. That text was a formative one for me throughout the process of this dissertation, as it exposed the ways that fat bodies in particular are expected to be apologetic of how much space their body takes up. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, fat bodies are supposed to apologize and are expected to be working on reducing that amount of space. Not working to consciously shrink one’s size, and embracing an unapologetic orientation to taking up space is radical in a system that does not privilege that. This concept will also be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

While gender performance will also be discussed in more detail in a later section, it necessitates bringing up in this section because it is connected to how participants discussed their sexual desire and attraction. In connecting performances of gender and desire, participants expressed frustration at the butch-femme dichotomy and the privileging of the masculine-of-center ideal lesbian type. As stated earlier, “We all like the same five girls.” Participant 4 framed this attraction as getting “pants-feelings for short-haired people” (Participant 4), meaning that the

short-haired, masculine-of-center and thinner bodied queer women are seen as more attractive/hot and get more objectified and desired. This is complicated though, as masculine women are still not privileged in the dominant sphere of society as femininity is still largely expected of women in many settings. For many participants, however, noting their attraction to butches or masculine-of-center women was a signal to their queerness early on and an important turn in understanding gender identity and expression.

Most participants interviewed identified as femme specifically or identified with femininity, and so there was some lamenting about the fact that their bodies are usually not seen as the bodies that are the “hottest” or more visible within queer women’s circles due to gender performance, in addition to their size. When participants were asked about whether or not their bodies were seen as desirable within the queer women community, almost all of the participants said they didn’t see their body being desired. This was related to gender expression, as mentioned, but also, specifically, some linked that lack of desire to fatness: “I think I just don’t feel desired because I’m fat and fatness is not desired” (Participant 3). Some clarified that they feel they might be desired, but only within their specific community

I think within my specific community, yes. But kind of like at large, I’m probably not, just because I don’t... And I don’t know, but I think I don’t fall very well within, like I don’t fit the norm. I’m very tall. I’m like bigger. So, I’m not like, you know, the typical or most ‘desirable’ looking person” (Participant 2)

In this excerpt, Participant 2, who also mentions that she is white and on the smaller fat end of the spectrum, qualifies her “unattractiveness” by saying that she’s tall and bigger, so that’s not what typically constitutes attractiveness.

Others, like Participant 8, define their queer community as being very specific, such as them and their partners, or them and some chosen family. For Participant 8, she feels that she does not have much time or access to queer community where she is geographically located, in

the Midwest, and especially as a Black queer woman, she does not often see or have opportunity to engage with queer women who look like her. When discussing her desirability, she states that she thinks her partner thinks she's attractive, "but in general, I don't think that I am." She qualifies that statement with the specification that because of her race, gender expression and body size, she doesn't see bodies like hers being held up as attractive or desired, whether in media content or in real life queer circles. Throughout her interview, because she is very interested in media, Participant 8 and I talked a lot about media representation, or lack thereof, for her. She described having to constantly be searching for any media with characters resembling her, and that even if she did find some, the characters were likely less developed or not main characters. Because she doesn't see herself, and others don't see people who look like her, she feels like it's hard for others to see her as attractive, with the intersections of her identity, particularly around size, ability, and race.

Conversely, others named specific body parts, especially breasts, as being reasons for their attractiveness, but then that their body size was a detriment to the other parts of what made them attractive. For example, breasts and breast size was something brought up by a couple of participants as rationale for their attractiveness, and a way to "overlook" their size.

The thing about tits is that they transcend a lot of barriers. So, I tell people my bra size and they're willing to overlook a lot of flaws. And I also think like I'm generally a nice person. I don't want to be like, I have good tits and that's it. I'm friendly and I have a nice smile. So, I do see my weight as a detriment to attractiveness.

Here Participant 1 stresses how she sees her tits as one of her "good" physical assets, especially due to her larger size. She sees them as a reason for people to "overlook a lot of flaws," in which she names her weight "as detriment to attractiveness." This sentiment is common, and is the driving ideology behind statements such as "Oh, you're so pretty for a fat girl," or "You're not

fat, you're beautiful," as if the two are contradictory ideas; the notion that fatness and attractiveness cannot coexist. But this notion of breasts or playing up one's breasts was brought up by several participants. When naming how she thought others would describe her body, Participant 7 mentioned that the first thing someone would likely name would be her "big tits." Similarly, Participant 5 mentions that her breasts have been brought up by many folks: "I have, you know, I've been told I have a fantastic rack by gay men and straight men and by gay women." In this quote, she stresses that her breasts are not just something that straight men find attractive, and because she is very vocal about her bisexuality, this distinction of multiple groups of folks finding her breasts attractive is something that was significant to her.

Part of this stressing of larger breasts is due to what is seen as societally desirable for attraction for women; large breasts are often always already read in an eroticized way. Because breast size tends to increase with body fat, often women of size have large breasts and many women of size take advantage of having a feature that is deemed attractive. But beyond larger breasts, other features of bodies of size, such as larger stomachs and fat rolls, are not seen as desirable or attractive; often these are framed as moral failures within the diet industrial complex. One participant discussed how part of the issue, in her opinion, was that we don't hear people talk about liking fat bodies often: "we don't get exposure to people who are talking about like, liking fat bodies at all (Participant 7)." Especially when fatness is not seen as something desirable to have on your body, people may get suspicious when you claim to be attracted to fat people. Along with some of the participants, I also tend to be attracted to folks who have bodies more like mine. Prior to this dissertation I had not thought as deeply about the distrust of thinner bodies being part of that, but it certainly informs it. However, when I do talk about (or show dating profiles of) people I find attractive, I often am not met with agreement or the obligatory,

“Oh she’s hot,” that one might expect. We are so often shown fatness as undesirable, and part of this is due to lack of media representation. While representation is not the sole aim or the sole liberatory factor for folks in more marginalized subject positions, being able to be seen and recognized carries weight;

When people are able to be seen, and see themselves in the narrative, the potential for possibilities increase dramatically, especially in terms of relationality; if fat bodies are seen as desirable, the broader cultural conversation is given room to shift. Consider the rise in popularity of Lizzo. Several participants brought up the significance that Lizzo represented for them as a person of size. Participant 2 mentions listening to Lizzo to get her pumped up for a hookup; “pretending I’m super confident even if I don’t feel it, has led to me feeling more confident.” For Participant 8, Lizzo carried a lot of significance in terms of visibility and representation.

And sometimes I feel good about my body, and sometimes I feel... I will say now that I’m, you know, like Lizzo is so popular and being a Black woman, I feel better about my body... But I will say seeing her and her popularity makes me feel a lot better about who I am in many ways.

Because of the importance of representation in fostering visibility, I asked participants to discuss how they saw their bodies within the context of mainstream US society as well, and if they saw bodies like theirs represented in media. Some participants said that they feel represented within their specific community based on who they associate with, but that those folks are not indicative of the broader LGBT+ community or media. None of the participants said they felt represented at a broader cultural level, both LGBTQ+ and not. Another participant mentioned that she’s started seeing more gay/queer stories, but that they have largely been about white gay men, such as “Love, Simon,” “Call me By Your Name,” or “Glee” (Participant 2). She doesn’t see this as a departure from heteronormativity:

When I think about assimilationist, because they're still like, for the most part, this seems like desired for representation. It's like... it's like heterosexual relationships, but like not exactly like it, but pretty much like it. Yeah, right. Not too much different.

In this quote, Participant 2 is highlighting how homonormativity pervades media representation, and the so-called progressiveness of it does not necessarily pan out when it continues to be stories about (thin) white men who have access to class privilege, as mentioned with the above-listed examples. In other words, a thin, white, able-bodied gay male love story is not that different from a thin, white, able-bodied straight love story.

On the other hand, some participants provided more nuance in how they understood their representation or lack thereof. For Participant 4, there was a lot of working through this question to understand the complicated nature of her answer. She discussed how her whiteness centralizes her experience as well as her access to financial security in the context of her community; "...when I look at TV and media, I see, see people who look like me in terms of whiteness and centering whiteness." However, she mentions that due to her body size and her relationship style (polyamory), "I am hurting for representation." Because she doesn't see herself represented at a lot of her intersections, she doesn't really feel completely represented in anything. This stresses the consideration of identity as intersectional; while she has parts of herself seen, she is not able to see her whole self-reflected back to her in the media that she has access to.

Part of the significance of discussing media representation, or the lack thereof, was for participants to highlight the importance of visibility. The more we see bodies that look like ours, and the more bodies that look like ours become sexual and romantic and multidimensional beings, the more possibilities become available, and the more people are exposed to larger bodies as attractive. If you never see your body as being referred to as attractive, how are others going to be exposed to that as well? Seeing other fat bodies online depicted as attractive, as objects of

desire, as being someone looked up to was an aspect of coming into fat consciousness that shaped me significantly. If I never got exposed to those images, I imagine I would have had a harder time in making efforts to work through my own internalized fatphobia. Making those efforts to do that work significantly impacts how I see myself, which also affects how others see me.

Building on that idea, and coming off of the conversations about desire, I asked participants to respond to questions about how other people saw them and their bodies. For several participants, when asked how others might describe their body, many mentioned that others would likely not bring it up, as Participant 1 mentions

People do avoid talking about my size. My partner always emphasizes, you know, you're a beautiful girl, you're attractive. I find you attractive. I get, you know, pretty. I get cute. Folks don't really... cause it's rude, you know, to say, "Oh well, I think you're fat." So, the descriptions I get from other people always sort of not mention my size.

This idea of dismissing discussing size, but insisting on beauty or attractiveness falls into the trope that women of size so often get: "You're not fat, you're beautiful." Many fat activists have argued, "But why can't I be both?" Additionally, because fatness is seen as such a negative, people will avoid bringing up body size. They do not want the person they are describing to think that they see them in a negative way, because fatness is seen as a negative. Therefore, if they avoid bringing up one's body all together, they can avoid having to wrestle with the connotations of fatness and attractiveness (and morality, and all of the other associations that get placed with fat in the United States macrocultural context).

In this same vein, others describe how relational others would bring up character traits of them and avoid referring to their body at all; this is a consistent thing for larger bodies. Participant 5 voiced similar thoughts, focusing on how people might describe her energy,

attitudes and roles; this was similar for Participant 7 as well. Due to age and body size, Participant 4 says that she thinks her body just becomes invisible. Another participant discussed that their partner wouldn't even use the word fat when describing their body because "she'd be worried about other people's perception of that... because she'd be worried that they would think she was calling me ugly" (Participant 6), even though their partner knows how they feel about the word fat. For others, if they have friends who identify as fat, they would use the term fat to describe them (Participant 2) since they know how she feels about the word and that they wouldn't be calling her ugly. But as mentioned earlier and throughout this chapter, people hesitate in even using the word "fat" because of the broader negative connotations, such as notions of failure, lack of attractiveness, unhealthiness, laziness, and so forth.

I asked participants to talk about how mainstream culture would describe their body. None of the participants framed this in a positive way, possibly because of the signification of fat. Universally the word fat was used, and used in the negative and derogatory connotation, not the reclaiming connotation. For the two participants who were over 40, they added "old" in to that description. Additionally, words like "overweight and unhealthy" (P6), "fat, hairy, old, broken, unhealthy...Unattractive. Gross" (Participant 4) and "A failure" (Participant 7) were used to illustrate this further. Because of these messages that we get through media, through others, and through dominant discourses, unlearning the negativity and devaluation of self requires a lot of work. For some participants, they note that this is a continual process and they are not where they would like to be. For others, they also note a shift in understanding learning to love or appreciate their body through finding other women desirable.

...when it comes to women, I tend to like bigger women. I find them more attractive. And I'm sitting there thinking, why can I look at this woman and say, "Oh my God, she's gorgeous," and look at myself and I have the exact same body type and think, "Oh my God, I'm so fat and ugly. Wait a second. That doesn't, that doesn't compute. And so, I

started looking at myself through the same eyes as I look at other people and realized, “Oh goddam I’m cute!” (Participant 5)

Similarly, Participant 4 talks about how body size and queerness intersected for her in learning to love other women and her body:

But then also, when I had this just like intense love for women and they hated themselves, I was like, it was like, if I can love a stranger so easily for her body, what the fuck am I doing with mine? And so, it was like empathy for other women that gave me self-compassion and that queerness gave me a way out. (Participant 4)

In these excerpts, the participants demonstrate some of how their thought processes panned out when it comes to body size and finding larger bodies attractive. By observing their own attractions to women and the ways they think about and experience other women’s bodies, they were able to apply that to their own experiences and relationship to their bodies. Learning to love women in a myriad of ways fostered greater love for their own bodies. While I had not made those links in thinking by myself, when brought up in conversation with Participants 4 and 5, I was able to see how I also had come to learn to love my own body through loving and finding other women attractive.

When asked about what bodies they find attractive, the responses were varied, but many participants articulated needing to have a greater connection than just “pants-feelings” (Participant 4) to be interested in pursuing a more significant relationship with someone. For example, Participant 4 mentions that she has had partners of all types of body shapes and sizes, and that she looks more for energy and connection. Participant 6, on the other hand, appreciates people who are athletes, and stresses movement and athleticism being something that interests her. Participant 1, who identifies as queer and asexual, looks for a “sense of comfort” over a specific physical type. Participant 3 also looks for people who are “comfy.” Similarly, Participant 5 seeks out people with a sense of humor and compassion before being concerned

about a specific physical type, though she does tend to be attracted to women who are “plus size.”

As illustrated in this section, fatness and desire are a complex and complicated subject. For many, this is something that is multi-layered and in constant process. One of the participants even hypothesized that queer women are less body-focused than gay men because, “I think that, you know, as women, we all know what it feels like to be insecure about our bodies, and there’s nothing worse, right? And so, I don’t think that we want to inflict that on anybody else.” For others, being constantly aware of the space their body takes up in public places, such as the pinching of a chair’s arms to remind them this chair was not designed with their body in mind, makes them constantly engaged with the notion of body and how others respond to it. However, for some, this identification around bodily experience can lead to greater connections and a sense of community.

Fatness and Queer Community. For some, queer community arises out of desire and romantic relational partners. For others, queer community includes but transcends this. Because there is so much stress on sex and desire in the queer community, some, like Participant 1, who identifies as asexual as part of her queerness, do not feel part of and gets angry at the constant sex obsession.

Yeah, I dislike the emphasis on sex all the time. I’m like, must we? But I do understand that. Yeah. You know, that’s kind of a big deal. I dislike assumptions about, you know, my own, like, sexual habits. I dislike having to explain myself in my relationships to every new person that I meet.

In this section of the interview, they acknowledge the importance of sex to queer community; how the ability to be able to sexually engage with people outside of heterosexual contexts is “kind of a big deal,” for many queers, especially in a society where sexual education does not frequently include non-heterosexual sex, and the dominant romantic and sexual narratives

presented in media are still heterosexual-appearing. However, for her, the hypersexual nature of queer community often leaves her feeling excluded or not part of in a way where she feels fully included and seen. Additionally, because queerness/queer community gets so sexualized, she also dislikes how people make certain assumptions about how she engages with others in relation to her body and her genitals. Because she might not engage in the same way as others expect, she ends up needing to do a lot of explaining and that labor gets tiring for her.

While I do not identify as asexual in the same way as Participant 1, I find myself often feeling demisexual a lot of the time, which falls on the asexuality spectrum. In this regard, I was able to relate to some of what Participant 1 was saying, in that I often am not able to find camaraderie with other queers about how badly I want to be sexually intimate with someone. My friends will joke with me and say, “Yeah, you need to have a conversation about their politics first,” but they are not incorrect. Desire is complicated, and when so much of queer community can be constructed around desire and sex, it can be a frustrating place for folks who fall outside of a hypersexual and aesthetically desired sphere. Part of this construction is due to how mainstream media depicts LGBTQ culture.

Because I was curious to see others’ perceptions of the mainstream LGBTQ media culture, since media culture often influences perceptions of community and belonging, I asked participants to come up with three words that they felt described that. The responses were fairly similar between all of the participants; only one participant deviated from the fairly typical response. Overwhelmingly, seven out of the eight participants (87.5%) included the word “white” in their response. Three out of eight (37.5%) participants used the word “male” or “masculine” as one of their three words. Additionally, three out of eight (37.5%) of participants referred to homonormativity, assimilation or privilege. Only two (25%) of the participants used

the word “skinny” or “thin.” Others utilized the words, “conventionally attractive,” “hypersexual,” “rich,” and “able-bodied.” These words also hint at notions of privilege or homonormativity. Only one participant deviated from these sorts of word choices and utilized the words, “pride, drag, and rainbow.” Her rationale was that when considering mainstream LGBTQ+ culture, what is seen more commonly are references to pride, especially during Pride Month, drag queens via RuPaul’s Drag Race, and rainbow capitalism. I think had I been prompted with that question, I would have answered with the “thin, white, masculine,” for some of the same reasons that many of the participants later explained.

The purpose of asking this question was to gauge the perception of how people viewed the way the broader queer community is portrayed and portrays itself, and to decipher if they felt they fit in, based on these descriptors. While participants may not have specifically discussed whiteness and how they perform it, there was at least acknowledgement that the portrayal and normative ideology around the queer community is predominantly white. While not using the same words, the majority of participants also hinted at how privilege, which includes able-bodiedness, attractiveness, and access to capital, is clearly associated with mainstream perceptions of queerness and queer culture. I thought this question was important to ask in order to better understand the perspective that participants were approaching the notion of “mainstream” US LGBTQ+ culture with. If these are the words that are in their heads as they consider their own belonging and sense of community, it is no surprise that many of the participants do not feel they fit into this conception of LGBTQ+ worldmaking.

Because of her intersectional identities as a queer, bisexual, disabled Black woman of size, Participant 8 mentioned how she often does not feel a part of the queer community. Throughout her interview, she mentioned consistently not feeling part of or belonging in many

spaces across her life, largely because of her blackness, but additionally because of her queerness and her politics. She says feeling like an outsider is nothing new; She struggles feeling like she belongs within her chosen career, academia, her church, her town, and in her relationship formation. Currently she is partnered with a white butch woman, and also feels outside of the Black queer community because of that. She also came to her queerness later in life, in her 40s, and feels like she was unable to get the same queer experience when she was younger that might potentially have led to more feeling of belonging. She even talked about how she received more attention from queer women when she was younger, but she wasn't out then. When asked about how she sees herself in the context of the US American LGBTQ+ community, Participant 8 responded that she was unsure, which she attributes to coming out later and being a queer person of color. The biggest themes in her narrative were around her feeling like an outsider or outcast, and the constant struggling and seeking out of representation and community.

One of the questions I asked participants about was the challenges of being in the LGBTQ+ community, as these undoubtedly influence whether or not people feel they can participate in said community or how much they feel they belong. For Participant 1, as mentioned earlier, the hypersexuality of queerness is a struggle for her. For Participant 2, because of her gender performance, she struggles with having to prove her queerness. For Participant 3, bodily presentation and gender performance were struggles for them; feeling like they are not "queer enough" (discussed later in the chapter in more detail), or that their body is not desired within the community, especially along the lines of fatness and genderqueerness. In other words, because they do not identify as cisgender and they are not thin, they feel as if their body and their gender identity and performance of such is not desired.

Participant 4 discussed how “the myth that we’re all the same,” and “unexamined privilege” especially in terms of racism, male privilege, and that femmes are doing a lot of the labor and not being acknowledged were the biggest challenges that she saw. Participant 5, who was the most vocal about her bisexuality, mentions that her biggest struggles are being assumed that she can pass as straight so she carries more privilege, and then straight couples wanting to engage with her for a threesome (commonly referred to as “unicorn hunting”). For Participant 6, who identifies as genderqueer, they struggle with their visibility and acceptance within the community and being called a lesbian due to their aesthetic choices, but that is not what they identify with. Participant 7 also struggles with being seen as how she identifies, especially by other queer women.

While I wanted to get a picture of what made queer community challenging for folks, I also asked participants what they liked and disliked about being in the queer community, and the queer women community especially. Some of this was linked into what makes queer community challenging, but there were some other insights as well. For Participant 1, some of what she likes about queer community is that she feels a sense of safety.

I like that I feel safe with most members, especially the ones that I spend time with. You know, I don’t surround myself with people I don’t feel safe with, but I like feeling like there’s nothing wrong with me. I like having spaces to sort of talk about, you know, feelings and experiences that I have that aren’t necessarily part of the straight experience. And I feel like a lot of queer spaces are always like aggressively happy ...in a good way, in the sense of like, you know, we’re supposed to be abject and miserable. So, screw you, like, we’re having a great time over here.

Beyond safety though, Participant 1 mentions in this section also feeling like she is able to be happy, contrary to how she is expected to perform affect of abjection as a queer person; the sort of narrative that to be queer is to be unhappy and suffer and not be accepted. That relief from having to explain oneself (to straight people) can be very allaying as well and contribute to

feelings of belongingness. Participant 2 draws on some of the same notions as were just discussed, but particularly, she likes how connected being part of the queer community makes her feel:

I think what I like about being part of the community is that when you find like, your community within the community, it's such like, a family. And I've been able to find like, family and community within like, friends that I have not been able to find, that I've not had, like within like, my like, blood related family. That's something that's been really important to me.

In this segment, she is hinting at the notion of family of choice, which is often a huge part of community, belonging and support for many queer folks, especially those who do not have a close relationship with their families due to a variety of reasons. That connection to other queers is one of the strongest reasons to seek out queer community and to help queer folks feel safe(r).

In addition to feeling a sense of safety and belonging, Participant 3 also discussed that they felt they could be their “freeist self,” and have many of the parts of who they are seen:

I feel like I can be my loud, wild self, my kinkiest self. Sometimes what feels like to be the freeist self. And so, that really feels nice that I can be like all of the things that I feel like I have been, but have toned down because I didn't know how to show them.

This notion of freedom is also hinted at in other participants' responses, such as Participant 1, mentioned above, who feels space to talk about things differently within the queer community.

For Participant 4, this freedom in queer community looks more like pursuit of pleasure:

I like that, that the queer community is full of survivors and people who, people who are willing to give up a great deal in the pursuit of desire. That, you know, when you, when you, when you say who I am and how I feel actually matters to me, it is a rejection of heteronormativity. And when queers come together, they are people who frequently are deeply connected to the pursuit of pleasure. And I love that. And I love that like, that pleasure is something that unites us. Like very few people are queer because they hate gay sex, right?... And then it's messy because we're also like, we're all survivors. And hurt people hurt people. And it's... really isolating because, because we're just all these hurt people who are trying to find community with each other. And frequently people feel like they're not enough.

While she also experienced similar feelings of not being enough, especially being able to “pass” as straight, Participant 5 stated that “I like the inclusiveness and I like the camaraderie.” Like many of the participants in answering many of the questions, there was not always one simple, uncomplicated answer. For a lot of folks there was duality, there was complication, and there was paradox. This was apparent in Participant 6’s response to this question as well:

I’m always a little hesitant in gendered communities at any point. I feel like a lot of, especially lesbian women, who I think sometimes are queer women and sometimes are not. There’s so much transphobia and I’m just not here for it. I don’t want to take part in it... So, whenever someone’s like, “This is an all-women’s retreat,” I’m like, “What’s that mean for you?” ... I’m always hesitant when people are labelling things by like, this is for gender, like this is this retreat, or this is that and this is this community, because I’m like, well now who’s getting now left out of our community who might really need it? And then I also have a hard time with that, because I think we really need it. And so like, sometimes I need spaces where there are no cis men. But that doesn’t mean that I wouldn’t welcome nonbinary folks, trans women, trans men. I just mean no cis men sometimes.

In this section, they discuss the need for spaces without cis men, but also how they worry about gendering certain communities, such as lumping queer women together, excludes other folks who might need community. At the same time, as they mention, “I also have a hard time with that, because I think we really need it.” Part of that need for close community is to provide support and encouragement in ways that folks might not get in other circles. When asked what she liked about being in the queer women community, Participant 7 said, “I mean, I think we rock. We’re pretty fucking cool....at least the women that I hang with, like we build each other up, you know? That’s cool.” Being able to receive and provide support is something that was echoed by many participants.

However, for Participant 8, this question of likes and dislikes was a both/and answer. She both likes and dislikes “being different and not fitting into the norm.” She elaborated on this by

saying that she likes being different from what people expect of her, but she dislikes how hard it is to find others for connection and in media representation as well as the “discrimination within the LGBTQ community based on the intersectionality of race and size.” This was consistent throughout her interview, as mentioned earlier, that she had sort of a dynamic back and forth with the perspective that this afforded her. But she was not alone in these nuanced feelings; for nearly all of the participants there was a both/and, and a negotiation of what belonging but not feeling part of simultaneously looked and felt like.

In terms of what the other participants disliked, as mentioned earlier, Participant 1 strongly dislikes the emphasis on sex all the time, because since she is asexual as part of her queerness, that doesn’t hold as much importance to her queer experience. For Participant 2, the binary thinking, specifically the straight-gay binary, is what she dislikes the most. One of the struggles that was voiced most frequently by Participant 2, and many of the participants who identified with bisexuality, was the feeling like they were not “enough” (elaborated on more in this chapter) or that they would not be seen as queer because they were not one or the other, referring to gay or straight.

For Participant 3, the fatphobia and racism within the queer community were some of the biggest struggles:

But the thing that I do hate is that I don’t like the fact that there is so much fatphobia. I don’t like... that there is so much racism or like, not explicitly calling out the racism that there is like, those things are a big problem in the queer community that I don’t enjoy. I don’t enjoy the proof aspect of it either, that like, I need to prove how queer I am or that I’m queer to begin with.

Here again the notion of “proving” one’s queerness is brought up; as will be elaborated on more specifically in the third part of this chapter. But it is worth noting here that it was something many, if not all, of the participants felt they struggled with and was something that made them

dislike parts of the queer community. In addition to people not feeling like they're enough, Participant 4 also dislikes how prevalent rainbow capitalism has become, but that she struggles with that because, "I hate the co-opting of queer culture. And then also love that like, teenagers can go to H&M and buy a leotard, you know, with, you know, rainbows all over it."

Similar to others, there is a duality in the things that Participant 4 likes and dislikes about the community. As for Participant 5, the bi erasure due to her "passing" as straight is something that she dislikes and makes her feel less a part of queer community. For Participant 6, as mentioned above, the transphobia and cis supremacy is something that is incredibly frustrating to them, as well as being placed into certain communities based on how their gender performance is read. For Participant 7, there was similar sentiments to others, such as fatphobia, but she also included how predatory behavior can go unchecked.

"...there's still a lot of objectification that happens, that is, goes unchecked, you know. Or a lot of fatphobia that goes like, unchecked. And it's just like, when you're like, standing like you're the only fat person standing around like a bunch of thin, queer women, like it gets bad really fast because I don't think they always, like, realize that they're, or care that like, they're being really fucked up and like, that hurts... I think that sometimes people, and myself included, like we'll, we'll not check ourselves because we're like, we think we've got an automatic pass or something or just doesn't become conscious of just like, oh, we can still be objectifying or like sexually aggressive or like predatory or whatever."

Here she calls out the community for not being more cognizant of the ways in which it can enact harm to people, or the ways that queer folks, and queer women, "can still be objectifying or like sexually aggressive or like predatory." Throughout the interview, it was apparent that the hurt that she had received from queer women was a big source of pain and part of why she did not feel fully part of the community. Sometimes, because of intersecting aspects of identity where one experiences marginalization, such as being a queer woman of size, there will be a lack of attention to interrogating the other aspects of one's identity, such as their whiteness or class

privilege or able-bodiedness. As mentioned above, "...we'll not check ourselves because we're like, we think we've got an automatic pass or something..." This idea of having a "pass" on owning up to other problematic behavior or the ways that one is impacted by systems of privilege was brought up by other participants as well, and will be articulated in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

As demonstrated in this section, what constitutes queer community and belonging can be paradoxical and nuanced. For many, being part of community meant holding conflicting parts of oneself and the ideas of what constitutes their community and what they want from their community. For the participants, one of the aspects that seemed to unite their responses was that fatphobia is consistently an issue across the mainstream queer community as well as within queer women's communities. This is linked to desire, as mentioned in the first section, as well as other unchecked behaviors and circumstances. While fatphobia is certainly not the cause of all of the problems within the queer (women) community, this section focused on how anti-fat bias permeates the structures that form our communities.

Complicating Fat Embodiment. There were some aspects of fatness that were significant but did not fit neatly into the other two subthemes in this section. In particular, issues with food, issues surrounding ways that fat bodies experience spatiality, in particular with transportation, aesthetic choices, and medical settings, are discussed in this section. While it may not fit as neatly into the other areas, these responses do address the third research question of this dissertation concerning place and space and larger bodies, and impacts the way(s) that participants experience desire, access to other bodies, and community.

Food was not explicitly brought up in the interview questions, due to the ways that fatness so often gets equated with food and with excess, and my desire to not replicate that

problematic association. While I did not specifically bring up food, it was a concern and point of conversation for all of the participants at some point during our conversations, and I did not change the topic if they wished to talk about it. Many participants did discuss issues with food in terms of disordered eating, eating in public, food morality and assumptions about food. In terms of assumptions about food, participants mentioned occasions when they would receive the wrong food, which was deemed as the “healthier” option, such as a salad or diet soda, when they did not order that while out at a restaurant. This was mentioned earlier with Participant 6’s narrative of her coke being switched out for a diet coke. Others commented on how they become hypervisible when eating in public; people feel comfortable staring at fat bodies consuming food, likely making judgements about the types and quantities of food being consumed. For example, when asked how she thought others might see her, Participant 1 mentioned that in addition to likely being seen as lazy, she assumes others are thinking, “She probably eats like shit,” when they look at her. Eating in public is a specific concern for many folks of size. As Participant 7 articulates,

I think eating in public is like, scary. I feel like I’m getting judged more then, because like, all I used to send texts like, I just like, I just bought a full pumpkin pie for myself, you know, and only like recently as I’ve gained weight, like have I become more conscious of who I’m sending that text to. But it’s still like, it’s still me. Like it was still both, like I was eating like this always, you know?

She reflects on how she has had to change her communication with folks now that her size has changed and it is less socially acceptable for her to eat an entire pumpkin pie herself. She also highlights how this isn’t something that changed when she became larger; “I was eating like this always,” but that when she is larger it becomes coded as something different. When larger bodies consume larger quantities of food than is seen as “acceptable,” they are often disciplined and this consumption of food is attributed to their fatness, which is then argued that it comes from their

individual choice, thereby they are deserving of the “punishment” (lack of care, social ostracism, inability to fit in spaces, etc.) that arises from said choices.

However, what that neoliberal narrative leaves out is that food access is often a class issue; foods that are “healthier” or less preserved are not as inexpensive or easy to find. Additionally, not all bodies react to food in the same ways. But because of these stereotypes and judgements about fat bodies and food, Participant 1 mentions not wanting to eat in public.

I don't like to eat around my family because of comments they made in the past. I don't like to eat around strangers. I don't like to be the only person who's eating. So, if there's somebody who goes out to lunch with me and they don't order anything, I'm like, “Why would you invite me to lunch then, you bastard? Order something, goddam it.”

She is not alone in the wanting to eat in public with others, but some fat activists have even encouraged fat people to eat in public to challenge the negative engagements that larger bodies get when eating in public and to take up space while nourishing their bodies. Even simply grocery shopping is often more difficult for folks of size, as Participant 3 articulates,

I sometimes don't fit in, into or in-between aisles while shopping. I feel and have heard judgement while grocery shopping. Like, if I put something in my cart that is seen as “unhealthy,” I have had people say like, “Oh, you must be having a fun night” or like, “Are you hosing a party or something?” You know. And it's like damn, let me just fucking shop. I don't need your opinion on like everything I do, you know?

Here they demonstrate the levels of surveillance that fat bodies often experience in public places, grocery stores being no exception. At this point, I shared with them about a moment when I went grocery shopping and the cashier asked if I was throwing a party. They interjected with enthusiastic agreement and laughter, and we determined that a party for one can still be a party. This was a moment where fat joy was able to be held, and the energy in that moment was one of levity and understanding.

As with many women in the United States, many of the participants have histories with disordered eating and brought this up during their interviews. For Participant 4, her queerness provided her a way “to eat and be hungry and take pleasure in food” and to start to recover from her eating disorder. However, Participant 6 discusses how their orientation to food is complicated, particularly in relation to the fat community.

And it’s okay to want to care for your body in the way you want to. I think a lot about this with food choices. As soon as I’m not really indulging a lot, sometimes people are like, “Oh, are you not part of the community?” And I’m like, I have a lot of issues around overeating, and everybody always says you can’t overeat. Great. I can. When I stuff myself so my stomach hurts, something’s going on in my life.

In this excerpt, Participant 6 is referring to how the fat activist community online tends to encourage indulgent consumption of food, or the idea that you cannot overeat. The rationale behind this is also a push for normalizing fat bodies eating food, especially foods that are labelled “bad,” because many fat folks have histories of disordered eating, as was evident with the folks involved in this dissertation as well. Many fat folks’ disordered eating along the lines of restriction does not get coded as such, but is rather seen as congratulatory weight-loss efforts, even if they are engaging in behaviors that would be considered starving themselves if they were in thinner bodies.

Several participants mentioned not being able to engage in food restriction because of behavior patterns they do not want to reproduce. This is a place where I also can return to, having a history of disordered eating myself, and wanting better, and treating my body better now than I have in the past. Participant 1 shared a specific example of why restricted eating is often dangerous for them:

I used to have some not so happy experiences dieting, and I find that I can’t diet at all in any way because I fall into calorie counting, like really immediately, and getting to some unhealthy, unhealthy amounts of calories in the sense of like, if

you go under a thousand, you feel really good for the day. And then that's not enough. That's actually how you die.

This is not an isolated experience for many people; restricted eating and overindulgence are both extremes on a binary of relationships to food. But this “overindulgent” push is also to challenge the notion that the only foods that are acceptable for fat bodies to eat are the ones labeled “healthy” or “weight loss” foods. However, Participant 6 highlights a tension, both for their life and the broader fat community. The fat community seeks to not shame folks for what they eat, however there tends to be vitriol if someone mentions restricting a food, even for non-weight loss reasons, such as Participant 6's desire to not eat till they hurt. This is something I have struggled with, having dietary restrictions as well, and many of the foods that fat influencers and activists use to “neutralize” food (doughnuts, pizza, cake) are things that I cannot eat or else it will harm my body in non-weight related ways. The limiting of food restriction talk in fat circles is to avoid triggering folks with disordered eating and food trauma in their past, but as Participant 6 demonstrates, it is far more nuanced than just engaging in “overindulgence” or censoring the kind of topics that are open for discussion.

For Participant 7, access to food and lack of appetite represent significant class and mental health issues. In her experience growing up in a working-class home, where access to food was not always ideal, as well as living with a parent and siblings who food and body shamed, she struggled to relate to food in a neutral way. Specifically, she talked about a time when she was hospitalized for her mental health and prescribed an appetite stimulant because she has lost so much weight, as a result of her depression:

I was very clear in that when I had the anorexia and I was in the hospital because I was passing out from hypoglycemia left and right. And like, I just couldn't move. Like, I couldn't. Like, I put like, there'd be like food in front of me and I'd be crying because I couldn't eat it. Like, I was just so sick, you know? And I got prescribed like Remeron, which is the antidepressant that simulates appetite. And

they're like, we're putting you on this. And I'm so grateful because I don't think if I had been like a fatter person that they would have prescribed me that. Like, I think it was because I was constantly losing weight and passing out and like having, like they could see me as skinny. Because otherwise I don't think I would have been prescribed that. But it saved my life. And that's very scary to me, is that if I have that problem again, will I be able to get prescribed something that will help me literally survive and not die?

In this excerpt, she talks about how much she was struggling with her mental health and how her struggle was seen by doctors because she was thin, therefore she was given an appetite stimulant in order to eat and gain some weight. However, she worries now that since she is significantly larger, if she were to have these symptoms, would she be given an appetite stimulant or it just be assumed to be a “good” thing that she would be losing weight? In other words, would medical fatphobia prevent her from receiving care?

As mentioned earlier, while I had been hoping for more discussions of medical fatphobia, there were a couple of conversations that arose around that topic. Saliency of the environment may be a factor here; for Participant 1, medical fatphobia has been a more recently pressing concern for them given an increase in health concerns. She shared with me a narrative about a time when she cut her hand and how medical professionals responded:

I hate going to the doctor. It's a mess. You know, that's challenge number one. Everybody who is a larger size has had a bad experience with the doctor. I still have a cough that's been prevalent since age 12, but I can't get anyone to diagnose because I'm fat, right?... So, I've had nurses weight me and then be like super rude about it. Last time I got weighed by a nurse, she said, “How much do you weigh?” in like a really patronizing, condescending voice and then started impatiently sliding the weight further and further over. And I was like, “Okay, fuck you.” And then recently I called the emergency room because I wasn't sure if I needed stitches or not in my hand. Very first question of the nurse on the line asked was how much I weighed. And I'm like, “I'm bleeding from my hand and I want to know if I need stitches, and it's midnight. Why are you asking about my weight?” It seems so relevant, right?

In this story, she shares how she gets nonverbal signals, such as “a really patronizing, condescending voice,” from a healthcare professional, which doesn't help foster the feeling that

one might be taken care of and provided care at the doctor. So many fat folks fear and avoid going to the doctor because of that patronizing communication as well as a lack of confidence in actually receiving (compassionate) care. In this section, she also shares about a call to the emergency room for a deep cut on her hand and how the first question was about her weight, which is seemingly irrelevant to the concern she was calling about.

When participants brought up instances of medical fatphobia, I shared one of my more poignant stories of medical fatphobia. I have had asthma all my life, though the way(s) that it gets treated and responded to when I am in this fat body versus in a thinner body in the past, are vastly different. A couple of years ago, I was having an asthma attack, and went to student health to receive a breathing treatment. My oxygen saturation was low and my lips were turning blue, but the doctor would not give me oxygen or albuterol until they tested my blood sugar because they “wanted to make sure my diabetes was under control.” After insisting to the doctor that I was not diabetic and had never been diabetic, she made a nurse take my blood sugar (it within normal range) because she did not believe me. Eventually I got a breathing treatment, but it was not until after the doctor had made lots of weight-based assumptions, jeopardizing my health.

The absurdity of asking for one’s weight while offering treatment advice for a hand laceration, as with Participant 1’s story, or denying breathing treatments until blood sugar was tested, as in my story, are all-too-common for folks of size. While most often a medical provider’s response to fat bodies tends to be negative or shaming: the oft-quoted, “well, the treatment is to lose weight,” or that whatever condition they are experiencing is brought on by “their obesity.” Participant 3 shares a story about the assumption of “weight-caused” conditions as well as how their body performed “health” in a way that was not expected by the doctor, based on assumptions about fat bodies:

I face a lot of medical challenges in terms of discrimination. I've gone to the doctor before for like a skin irritation or keloids on my back and been told that like, being fat is a reason, so like, as long as I can be not fat, then like, that'll be great. You know, I've also had doctors who have explicitly told me and been shocked when they've done my blood pressure and seen that it's like, not bad. They'll be like, "Whoa, wow, like I just didn't expect that." And I'm like, oh, because I'm fat, like you thought it would be much worse, you know? And then on the other end, like, if I had bad blood pressure, then they might say, "Oh, see, we knew it. Like we knew that you would have bad blood pressure."

Here Participant 3 demonstrates the impossible standard that is placed on fat bodies within medical settings. If their blood pressure hadn't been as "good" as it was, which they were not expecting or prepared for, they would have been scolded for that blood pressure being a result of their fatness. It functions as almost a macabre sort of joke within fat communities that if you go to the doctor, no matter the issue, the advice and solution is going to be "lose weight." Because so often weight is seen as the cause of issues, or that weight loss would resolve health issues, people of size are often not taken seriously by doctors. This dismissal and essentializing of fat people can lead to some serious consequences because diseases and illnesses will go undiagnosed or untreated because of a provider's prejudice.

Participant 6 shares about her mental health and how her fatness intersected with that and led to not receiving a diagnosis for a long period of time:

I went undiagnosed with depression until I think I was 33. And I think, I mean, part of that was that I pushed back at it for sure. I was really worried about being labeled anything, but also, I had a lot of therapists. I should have been diagnosed much earlier. But doctors kept telling me that you'll be happy if you lose weight. So I kept trying to lose weight... But really, medical stuff has been... I've had a really hard time getting help for digestive issues. Cause so much of it is like, well, what are you eating and everything. They're like, "What are you eating? If you lose weight, that'll be fixed." And so sometimes I lie to doctors about how much exercise, I do, just so they'll look at, which is not great. I don't want to lie to doctors. It doesn't help them get answers. But sometimes the only way to get them to look at something is if I lie.

In this narrative, they share about some serious medical issues that went undiagnosed due to their weight, or the assumption that their weight was the cause of their depression. Instead of learning that the doctor is a place to find care, through these experiences Participant 6 learned that sometimes they have to lie to the doctor, “just so they’ll look at it.” During this conversation, I shared with Participant 6 how I had lied about my blood pressure, just by two points, so that a doctor would give me birth control to manage my hormone levels, which they had previously denied me due to my weight and blood pressure. As they mentioned above, “I don’t want to lie to doctors,” but I do want to receive care and I do want to be able to manage my physical and mental health in the ways that I know best serve it.

There were also discussions of complicated relationality to the notion of weight loss and health. Most of these discussions centered around physical disability, or how being in a smaller body might ameliorate or mitigate some of the concerns that go alongside of their disability/ies and the struggle they have with that idea. Participant 4 spent a significant amount of time discussing the conflicting feelings and challenges she has with her body size:

I come from a family of people who don’t move, or from a mother who’s disabled because she doesn’t move. And it is... there are times when my body, like and I have chronic pain, I have IBS, I have arthritis. I have a few things that are chronic pain associated. And so there are things that are related to pain and the size of my body that are connected. And I feel gross about them. Like, I feel embarrassed about them. Like, I don’t know. There are times when I intentionally try to reduce my body size because it is physically reduces pain in my body at times, like... But then I’m like, “Oh my God, am I in a disordered eating space?” ... I want to be as, for myself, as body positive and fat positive as I am for other people.

The tension and conflict that she experiences is palpable in this portion of the interview. She has very real consequences in her body due to an increase in size, but she struggles with efforts to reduce her size because of her disordered eating past as well as wanting to be, “for myself, as body positive and fat positive as I am for other people.” The desire to reduce pain

through weight reduction and be fat positive at the same time can cause intense cognitive dissonance, especially for folks who are committed to fat liberation or are politically fat (similar to queer, to be elaborated on at the end of this chapter). Similarly, Participant 5 also mentions her family history with weight and disability as something that leads to a desire for her to lose weight.

And well, yes, sometimes I definitely want to lose weight. My parents both have a degenerative spine disorder, and you know, I'd like to lose weight in order to not have the same amount of pain that they do. I'm not losing weight because I'm ugly and I need to lose fat because then I'll be beautiful. It's, I need to not be in pain.

Both Participant 4 and Participant 5 are careful to make the distinction that this desire for weight loss is not for self-acceptance reasons or the idea that they are not attractive unless they are thinner. Both of them mention being attracted to and enjoying the bodies of larger women; the struggle to even articulate this desire for weight loss was apparent nonverbally with both of them during the interview. Their voices softened, they didn't make eye contact with me, as if they were feeling remorse from even desiring weight loss. But talking about weight loss is complicated, as Participant 4 elaborates:

And then you lose a little bit of weight, and you're like, "I'm really depressed." And people are, "Great job!" you know? And it's just so hard to actively reject that when also internally you're like, I mean, I do want some atta girls, you know? So, I think that that is, that is a place that is, that is hard. And I think there's a lot of folks who are body positive who are like, body positive warriors who are, who you know, as a way to keep themselves safe and happy are like, they have no room for that nuance. And it's like you're either with us or against us, or you're like, you know, like, and I think that like a lot of fat people who are body positive still think about diets and still think about health and still think about those things and still think about like, what do they want for their body?...And I don't know where or how these conversations happen, but most people I know internalize them and feel like failures for wanting to have them or they do secret things. And secrets, when we have secrets in our communities, that's where shame lives.

As hinted at with Participant 6's story earlier about struggling to talk about overindulgence, and in Participant 4's reflection here, there is struggle for folks to articulate their issues with food as well as any discussion of intentional weight loss (IWL) within fat communities. Many fat communities have a no IWL talk policy, either explicitly or implicitly stated, and stress talking about food in a neutral way, as opposed to "healthy," "guilt-free," "empty calories," et cetera. The logic behind "no IWL talk" and "no food shaming," again returns to notions of disordered eating as well as how fat bodies who do not work towards weight loss are often villainized. The argument is also made that there are plenty of places where IWL talk can occur, but not as many spaces where no IWL and no food shaming can occur. Unfortunately, these binaries often leave behind folks like Participants 4, 5, and 6, and I would hypothesize, a great many more folks of size as well. These concerns raise an important question for the fat community: how can we talk about disability, weight, and weight loss, and remain fat positive?

Some of the desire to be smaller experienced by folks of size can also be related to physically fitting into spaces and the struggles that go alongside of not being able to literally fit in somewhere. When asked about challenges that they face in relation to their body size, physical fitting into spaces was the biggest concern a lot of the time. Some participants discussed difficulty in going to places like movie theatres and amusement parks, and the anxiety about whether or not one's body is going to fit into the space provided. For a personal example, I enjoy going to live theatre productions. Unfortunately, most of the theatres, particularly those built before the 2000s, have fairly small seats. When Trixie Mattel came to Albuquerque, she performed at the Kino Theatre downtown, which has tiny seats with metal arms. When we left the show, I had bruises on my thighs from being wedged into that chair for 2+ hours.

Improperly fitting seating occurs in a variety of settings, and in that vein, some of the participants brought up travel, and specifically air travel. They discussed the tricky navigation that larger bodies have to engage in while flying. Several of the participants mentioned being in academia and needing to engage in plane travel often for conferences, and how that is often a huge stressor for them in their professional lives:

My worst nightmare is a completely full flight. I find that I'm always the last row somebody will go in the middle seat for. And I struggle, you know, doing up the seatbelt and I absolutely refuse to ask for a seatbelt extender because I don't want the flight attendants to look at me like that.

Participant 1 brings up one of the other difficulties about airplane travel that is often not talked about but definitely present in the minds of folks of size when they fly: the seatbelt extender. Seatbelt extenders are not easily accessible; one has to know to ask for it from a flight attendant, which carries shame and embarrassment in asking, and in other passenger's reactions. Additionally, being a larger body often means that others will try to avoid sitting with you as much as possible and may not treat you as kindly as they would a smaller passenger. For many bodies of size, flying means physical discomfort and pain as well as emotional distress, social anxiety, and shame. As Participant 4 mentions,

...airplanes are the absolute worst place on the planet. And that is where I will frequently get the most open, like, that the open like, distaste and visual cues that my body is not welcome in and that especially on like, a Southwest flight. Right? Like, oh, it's the worst. Because, because it's just people are like, "Don't sit next to me, don't sit next to me," like the entire way up. It's a gauntlet, you know?

In this section, Participant 4 points out several things that are significant. One of the things highlighted in this section is the notion of specific cues of "distaste" that fat bodies receive at times in public places, and particularly on planes. She mentions visual cues, and from my own experience receiving "distaste" in a similar way on planes, typically this manifests in either a lack of eye contact, or a glare, furrowed eyebrows, and clear nonverbal efforts to discourage

larger bodies from sitting in proximity, such as a bag on a seat, coughing, et cetera. Again, this sort of shaming comes from individualistic ideas that fatness and inability to fit into spaces is entirely a personal issue, or something that someone has “brought on themselves,” thereby rendering compassion far less present for many larger bodies when these sorts of interactions occur.

Hinting at how this is a problem, Participant 3 mentions that “navigating spaces is really hard, like airports, airplanes, buses, public eateries, those kinds of things like, I feel less and less trusting of structures the fatter I get.” They specifically name the idea of structures being the limiting factor here; structures are not built for larger bodies and lack of access for larger bodies is a structural issue. Instead of addressing the structural issues, culturally we continue to shift and place the blame on larger bodies for their lack of conformity to spaces; we even go so far as to call the existence of many larger bodies an “epidemic.”

Relation to physical space may not seem like a significant issue to thinner folks, but for folks of size it is one that is omnipresent in many different daily engagements. In the words of Participant 6, “I’m often worried about how will I fit into this space? And it’s very literal, how will I fit? It’s not like there aren’t people who like me.” Worries about the chair at a job interview or a classroom, carpooling with a friend and worried the seatbelt might not reach, going to a pal’s house and breaking their furniture; all of these are omnipresent in the minds of folks of size as they make choices about engaging with others. Considerations about fitting in the desk during student presentations, whether or not a seatbelt extender is needed to carpool with a friend, worrying about whether someone has size accessible furniture at their house; these might seem like non-considerations to thinner folks, but they are often a complicated interplay of past experience and anxiety for fat folks.

Consider the narrative from Participant 2 about the kinds of stress that this concern can have on one's life:

Yeah, I think like, I often worry often times about like, physically fitting into spaces. And like I said, like, my body has changed a bit over this year, so that's been slightly less of an issue. But still, like I am, like, you know, bigger than the movie theater seats a lot of times or like the desks in the classrooms. I went to Disney World with my family over the summer, and I was like, so anxious, like going into that like, I'm not going to fit in these rides that I'm gonna get, I'm gonna wait for two hours to get at the front and then I'm not gonna fit and it's gonna be so embarrassing. So, I think like, physically fitting into spaces or like, if I'm going on a date with somebody or something and we go to like, I don't know, like a play or something, right? Another stadium situation, like I might not fit in the space, so physically fitting in spaces is something... (Participant 2)

In this section Participant 2 spotlights some very specific situations in which one might carry body anxiety with them, such as amusement parks, classrooms, and entertainment venues. Not only does a lack of size accessible seating limit who is able to participate in the event, being forced to sit in chairs that are too small is physically painful and socially embarrassing.

In addition to concerns about travel and fitting into spaces, the workplace is yet another place where bodies of size typically face some difficulty, whether it's, again, the furniture at the place of work is not designed for larger bodies, or workplace weight loss initiatives, or even bosses and coworkers who comment on others' bodies. This sort of constant harassment can cause people to want to or actually leave their jobs. In fact, the fatphobic environment was one of the contributing factors that Participant 5 left her last job:

My last job that I had before this one, I was there for four years and it was constant comments about my weight and health. And she made a lot of inappropriate comments. But like, I got treated like shit. Everybody else got treated normally, everybody else would be on their phones, they were treated fine. I was on my phone, I'd get picked on.

While there may be other factors that came into play with her getting picked on for being on her phone, comments about weight and health are not necessarily always deemed inappropriate

comments but often really are and create an uncomfortable work environment. Sometimes this weight and health talk looks like coworkers discussing their diets, but sometimes it is a supervisor specifically drawing attention to one's body, as Participant 7 mentions:

But it's that kind of like, intentional, like very, very intentional feedback that like my bosses always have like... I've had one boss who hasn't done this, but will be like, at various times will be like, have you lost weight? ... And I'll be like, fuck no. I don't know.

As we chatted, Participant 7 talked about how hard work environments are for her, partly because of that sort of interaction. She mentions in this segment that she has only had one boss not comment on her weight in some way. One of the concepts that she points out here is the notion that weight loss is inherently good, and to ask someone if they've lost weight is to be perceived as a compliment. As it came up in conversation, I shared a story with several participants about an engagement I had with someone over the summer. An acquaintance of mine had come up to me and said, "You've lost a ton of weight!" I responded to him, "I have?" He assumed that since I had been going to the gym all summer that my goal and thereby accomplishment from doing so was weight loss. I informed him I was going to get strong, not to lose weight, and that complimenting someone on weight loss is not as nice as one might think it is. After I shared this story with the participants, they could all relate, and Participant 4 raised the point, "And when people say things like that, you're like, what are you observing about my body?"

Constant observing about bodies, and in particular how weight might fluctuate on bodies was something that participants noted affecting them as well. In particular, Participant 1 has noticed that,

As I've gained more weight, I don't get as many cat calls, which is nice, but I still do get them sometimes. And people will still show up and act attracted to me. So,

I guess it varies, but as my size is growing, the more people tend to not notice, which is.... can be relieving.

Because of how omnipresent the white heteropatriarchal gaze is, it makes sense that a decrease in surveillance might be ameliorating, particularly because the observing of bodies of size is often not doing with admiration or from a place of kindness. As Participant 3 shared,

So, I might not be to like, what the mass public would look at and say, “morbidly obese.” They might have a different opinion because they’re probably watching shows like *My 600lb Life* and so they’re forming opinions that “those people are the monsters that we should all be fearing...” I do not believe this, but this is exactly what the narrative pushes from this show. And so, I think that if they were to see me, they’d be like, “Well, she doesn’t look like she’s 600 pounds. So, she’s still able-bodied... She’s still able to do things and take care of herself. So, she’s really unhealthy. She’s really sad. She’s obese, but she’s not super monstrous. Not monstrous enough yet.

In this segment Participant 3 points out the idea that observation leads to comparison which leads to continued fat shame and othering. In other words, shows like *My 600lb Life* provide a space for folks of all sizes to say, “Well, at least I’m not like them,” because the folks on the show are portrayed as “monstrous.” This is harmful because it perpetuates this us versus them mentality and the dehumanizing of bodies that are over a certain size. Fat bodies used for comparison or motivation to not be a particular way is nothing new; as mentioned earlier in this document, shows like *The Biggest Loser* exist solely to profit off of this notion of “at least I’m not like them.”

Concluding Thoughts on Theme One

While this is not, by any means, an exhaustive discussion of the various ways that fat bodies experience space and place, desire, and queer community, this section provided a look into how the participants in this study related to these things. Specifically, this section sought to provide nuance to these topics that are often not afforded the space to engage in more specification. In particular, this section challenges us to consider the ways that fatness and desire

are informed by each other and simultaneously inform understandings of queer community.

Because queer community is linked so strongly to desire, fat folks, who are often not desired, can feel very isolated from queer community. Some of the takeaways from this theme are the further stress on not essentializing all fat experience, as was demonstrated across the theme sub-themes.

Specifically, in the section on fatness and desire, seeking out and engaging romantic/intimate relationships is depicted as a challenge. Part of this is due to fatphobia, and the way(s) in which larger bodies are not often constructed as a site of desire. Another part of this brought up by participants, was that the way(s) that fat bodies engage with other bodies in sexual contexts are not the same as the way(s) that thinner bodies do. In other words, fat sex is not the same as thin sex. Because of fatphobia and misunderstanding about how to engage with fat bodies, thin(ner) bodies were constructed by the participants as more desirable and having more opportunities for sexual engagement.

Along those lines, the distrust of thin(ner) folks was a consistent source of critique amongst the participants. Part of this is due to how thin(ner) bodies receive more privilege, and how thin(ner) bodies are often not able to understand the everyday, material realities of navigating the world in a larger body. Another aspect of this critique was in the way(s) that participants reflected receiving harm, whether intentional or not, from thin(ner) bodies who maybe had more fatphobia to unpack than they had indicated.

In terms of queer community, several participants reflected frustration at the constant emphasis on sex, particularly with how that puts certain pressures on their bodies and articulating other parts of their identities. Specifically, for participants who identified with asexuality in some way, this emphasis on sex made them feel less part of queer community. Even for participants who did not identify with asexuality, being in a fat body in a community that elevates thinner

bodies as the aesthetic ideal was a source of frustration, as discussed in more detail in the previous subtheme.

When asked to discuss how they conceptualized what queer community looks like in mainstream culture/media, participants described it as overwhelmingly white and masculine. Notably, ideas about privilege and assimilation were also mentioned, including that the ideal queer subject in mainstream culture/media is likely also thin and with access to capital. Because of this, most of the participants, for a variety of reasons, did not feel that they were queer “enough,” and many did not feel part of a community where they supposedly belong.

Lastly, in the final subtheme of this section, complicating fat embodiment, it was clear that food represented a complicated issue. Given that several of the participants mentioned their disordered eating histories, consequently, there were discussions about struggles with navigating things like food restriction, weight loss, and other people’s assumptions about them based on what they eat. Additionally, assumptions about their bodies and their health, in terms of medical fatphobia, was brought up as a significant issue by a couple of the participants. Often weight loss gets prescribed as the solution to all manner of ills, even if it is not appropriate to the situation, such as Participant 1’s story about her hand injury.

While many expressed frustration with weight loss being painted as the solution for everything, several also expressed difficulty and cognitive dissonance at the idea of losing weight. For some participants, they wanted to be able to talk about weight loss, and specifically weight loss surrounding their amelioration of symptoms of their disability/ies. Intentional weight loss (IWL) is often not a topic given precedence within fat circles, so it was important that participants both brought it up and provided some nuance to the conversation about it.

As I reflected on this section, I thought about how I came to understand my queerness and my fatness, especially relating to desire, community, and complications within and outside of those places. For me, coming into fat and queer consciousness was simultaneous, and I cannot separate the two. This perspective means that I am always already a fat queer in my understanding of self; my experience with desire, queer community, and fat embodiment all stem from the understanding that they are inextricably linked. When I am swiping on dating apps, or thinking about my body in terms of engaging with others intimately, I know that my fatness is hypervisible. When I engage with others in the queer community, I am aware that my fatness renders me outside of what is typically considered attractive. My fatness impacts my access to healthcare, to travel, to jobs, and to relationships. These are not things I have talked about with many people in the past; often people are not willing to listen, especially when it means checking your thin privilege. But I found that through working on this dissertation, I had an increased willingness to share with others.

In this next section, I build on these considerations and specifically look at the idea of whiteness and privilege, along the lines of white femininity, complicating fatness and privilege, and various ways in which one might internalize fatphobia.

Whiteness & privilege

In this section I consider the ways in which whiteness and privilege function invisibly and visibly alongside of fatness through the following themes: 1) The invisibility of white femininity, 2) degrees of fatness and privilege, and 3) internalized fatphobia. Through these themes I interrogate how white femininity comes to play in notions of “acceptable” bodies and how fatness challenges the “appropriate” white, female body, how not all fat embodiment equals the same experiences in terms of privilege and access, and how the internalizing of fatphobia

contributes to the other types of oppressive systems. I begin this section with the invisibility of white femininity, because it was rarely explicitly mentioned, but it was very implicitly present within the conversations between me and the participants.

The Invisibility of White Femininity. As the majority of my participants were white women, as myself, or were socialized as white women but identify as genderqueer, white femininity is omnipresent within the study. However, deeper reflections on the ways in which their bodies are raced and the impacts of that on their gendered and sized bodies were not as present. Part of this may have been my own lack of pushing participants as much as I could have to discuss race, although it was brought up by me in each interview. Often when the topic of race arose in the interviews, there was mention to the need to not be racist, or the axiom that queerness does not dissolve one of their racism, but there was much less specific attention to the ways that one's racial identity functions to offer privilege or disparity. Part of this may also be white folks' broad lack of understanding about how to articulate their raced bodies and experiences as well as the invisibility of white privilege.

Race was most specifically brought up with Participant 8, who identifies as a queer Black woman. For her, especially in her current geographical context of the Midwest, her blackness is always already the lens through which she is being received. Again, for her, her racial identity is more salient than other aspects, "I feel more aware and conscious of race than my sexuality or my size." Because of the invisibility of whiteness, this may be why body size is hypervisible or aware for many of the participants; this is the lens through which they are received. For others, there were occasional mentions of being white or that whiteness is something that impacts their sense of identity and how they are read, but there was not nearly as much unpacking there as with body size. Part of this may be due to the way(s) that unpacking fatphobia does not have to

inherently include anti-racist work, though one might argue that it should, and my own white femininity functioning (in)visibly and my body size functioning very visibly.

I think about the way that I was hyper aware of my size while sitting in the interview room with my participants. I was mindful of what seating options were present; do I give the participant the smaller chair, and risk them being uncomfortable, or do I use the smaller chair? Is that an exertion of power from me as the researcher? What do I wear in order to make them feel comfortable and myself feel confident in conducting these interviews? Is this too bold? Is this too femme/butch? When I think about the amount of labor I put into considering how my size affected my participants, I did not put the same amount of labor into considering how my whiteness might play out in the interviews. Again, this is the invisibility of whiteness, as I was interviewing mostly white participants, and not feeling the need to as deeply interrogate my own whiteness as present within the interview space.

Despite my own lack of raising the issue, some participants did name whiteness as part of what renders someone as more “conventionally attractive,” in terms of mainstream representation and portrayal. When discussing the lesbian event Dinah Shore that takes place in Southern California every year, Participant 3 discussed how their advertising was all “white, blonde women, both masc and femme” who are also thin. This was not something that appealed to them; in fact, they used this as reason they would not want to go, but they do note that this is still very much the way in which more mainstream lesbian events are still advertised. One of the underlying ideas that wasn’t explicitly stated but became apparent in this section was how many of the participants expressed how whiteness is seen as more of the default, which renders it as being considered more attractive. I think this may have been something that did not get as explicitly discussed because many of the participants struggle so much with being seen as

attractive due to their fatness, that they do not want to admit how their race and or their gender expression might contribute to some privilege.

For some participants who clearly depend on their white privilege in a variety of ways, the mention of their whiteness was part of how they described or identified themselves but then was left off there. For Participant 1, who identifies as an intercultural scholar, it was apparent that she knew she needed to at least bring up whiteness, but she avoided discussing some more significant implications of her middle-class whiteness:

So, I come from a middle-class white background, so that is typically an advantage. My family is highly educated. Going to college was always just sort of a given. So, in that aspect, I consider myself to be the neutral default. As a woman and as a queer woman that is where the difficulties tend to arise, and also as a person with mental illness.

She brings up the notion of being the “neutral default,” and attempts to complicate that with her identities as a queer woman with mental illness. Certainly, they are huge factors in how she experiences the world, however, these aspects of her identity do not erase her classed and raced and educational privileges. Later on in the interview she mentions, “I do tend to come off as very non-threatening just based on my femininity and my whiteness and my general sunny personality.” Her connecting her whiteness to the idea of being non-threatening is important, and perhaps why her larger size impacts her so significantly, in that people read her height and body size as more threatening and less “ladylike.” Her size becomes a departure from the expectation of her performance of whiteness and her size drives her away from the center of white womanhood; her size means that her body has deviated from ideas of control and containment. Here, the fat female body “symbolizes domination or resistance to idealized femininity” (Gailey, 2012, p. 116).

Mainly, the ways that whiteness played out in the interviews was in how white femininity invisibly (but also not-so-invisibly) constructs what a “proper woman” should embody. For

Participant 1, as mentioned above, her queerness and her size were the only things that removed her from the specter of white femininity. She discusses with pride how she is very “ladylike”:

I always wear dresses and skirts. And that’s partially because of my size. It’s just easier to find dresses and skirts that are more comfortable. But also as a signal, you know, I like pretty things and I like to be feminine...I am still invested in the idea of looking pretty and wearing delicate pretty things. And generally, my mannerisms tend to be quite typically like white feminine, like very quiet, sort of polite, non-confrontational, all of those things that come to be expected.

Participant 1 stressed multiple times about how her femininity and whiteness (and personality) rendered her non-confrontational, non-threatening, and not an angry person. She takes pride in her ladylike appearance and demeanor, although commenting that’s tempered, “with a side of sailor,” referring to her language usage. When more specifically discussing whiteness, she mentions having difficulty with it:

I have trouble negotiating my whiteness a lot of the time because you know, you’re conditioned to not think about it, even though you know that you’re conditioned to not think about it, your brain still finds these avenues to not think about it. And you’re like, “God damn it, I’ve been not thinking about this for like 30 minutes.”

In the interview with her, as pointed out in this section, it was apparent that many of her observations about whiteness were still coming from a sort of individual perspective and indicated her still in process of working through some white guilt. Much of her reflections on whiteness were about her body and as one of her identity vectors, but not as broadly connecting it to systems and the effects that has on her body as well as others.

For Participant Two, her mentions of whiteness were much more superficial and tertiary. When she brought up whiteness (and cisgenderness) it was more about naming them as places and structures of privilege, but without more nuanced consideration of personal implication or unpacking those structures. When asked how others would describe her gender performance, she mentions that they would likely say, “Yeah, she’s a woman. And like, she embodies all of that.”

However, she does not offer more clarity in that moment to unpack what embodying “all that” of a woman means. Likely, she is referring to constructions of femininity in regards to aesthetics, nonverbals, hobbies, and so forth.

Additionally, when talking about how people might describe her body, she tells how folks from her home in the South would describe her:

And they would be like, kind of I think, put it back on like, “Yeah, her daddy was big, too. And like, her mom’s family” and stuff like that. So, kind of trying to like, I don’t know, make excuses for the way I look, but kind of trying to, like, make it be like, “It’s not just her fault that she’s fat. Like everybody in her family except for us is fat.”

Because fatness is an undesired trait, and something that grants someone less access to privilege, being fat is seen as a failure and a specifically a failure of white femininity, in this case. Fatness signifies excess and inability to control, which signal departures from the desired aspects of white femininity in relation to keeping one’s body small and contained. Fatness signifies a lack of willpower and an inability to provide proper control over one’s body. In this small section above, Participant 2 talks about how people try to “make excuses for the way I look,” by removing some of the onus on her for her fatness and placing it on her family, seemingly in an attempt to ameliorate the damage done to her privileged identity by her fatness. I think about how my grandmother used to also engage in this sort of strategy to downplay my “issues with weight,” by saying that it was something “all the women in our family struggle with.” However, an important distinction in my experience was that even in providing such an explanation, individual responsibility was not removed, but was in fact, heightened. After coming to more clear understandings about my whiteness and white femininity over the last several years, I can see how that sort of “educational moment” between my grandmother, my mother, and me was a shaping of white feminine ideology about body conformity.

As was pretty typical, in that they were the most verbose interviewees, Participant 3 and 4 had the most nuancing when it came to discussions about whiteness. For Participant 3, whiteness was complicated because they are first generation, but that they have privilege in that as well:

I am fat and I'm white. I come from, like, I'm technically first generation here in the U.S. because my mom came here. She immigrated from the Azores or from Portugal. So, I know that my skin color and my overall race affords me many, many privileges that some fat people, some queer people and lots of people in the world don't get to have. So, I think my fatness is more acceptable. It's maybe more like, under the radar. And I think that my queerness is also more visible. Like, I can see other people who look like me, who are queer and like, people of color, specifically like Black people because of the racism within the queer community. I am also able-bodied, like I have some disabilities, but those disabilities don't really make it so that I can't go places or make it so that-actually, I shouldn't say can't go places, because my body size does make it so that I can't go certain places. I don't often have to think about like, "Okay, does this place have like all the accessibility that I need?" Because I can get up stairs, I can do like certain things that lots of bodies can't do, too.

In this passage Participant 3 works through some of the nuance that they experience in terms of race and body. As they mention above, their "skin color and my overall race affords me many, many, privileges that some fat people, some queer people, and lots of people in the world don't get to have." They acknowledge the broader connection to a more global consideration of what privilege means and looks like, as well as consideration of race beyond just skin color. They mention that they are able to see people that look like them in terms of race, but that when it comes to body size it is far less common; this was something consistent for them as well as Participant 4 when talking about representation and media.

For Participant 4, she acknowledged how her white skin gives her a lot of privilege in a lot of spaces in terms of how she chooses to express herself. "I think it's a combination of my white skin, my able-bodied, my feminine presentation, and in that, you know, but, but there's a lot of micro aggressions." What she means here is along the lines of other aspects of her identity,

such as her polyamory, her queerness, her age and her size, she still experiences microaggressions, but that those microaggressions are not because of her race. However, as she mentions,

But like, so that I think that's, in terms of my identities and being in a room, I have a lot of privilege in that I get to frequently pick and come out because my body and my skin and my age and my like, gender presentation, right? All of those things are things that can fly under the radar because of white supremacy and cis supremacy. Right? So, I get to be like, I'm going to share this thing with you. And also, I just feel like it's really complicated to hold all the things that I am in a room at any given time.

She calls attention to an important point, that because of her whiteness and cisgenderedness she gets to choose what identities she discloses to people; "So I get to be like, I'm going to share this thing with you." Folks whose identities may be more visible, such as people of color, people of size, and physically disabled folks may not have the option to get to choose when to "come out," with a particular part of their identity; those parts of identity are always already (hyper)visible in many situations.

For Participant 5, who is white and Native American, specifically Cherokee & Lumbee, she finds that she is read as white due to her appearance and that her Native identity gets erased: "Well, I mean, I'm very white-presenting, so I get a lot of privilege that comes with that... I get that there's a lot of privilege that I have. But you know, when I do say, "Hey, I'm Native," most people don't..." She trailed off as she said that, but appeared disheartened at how her race and ethnicity was read because of her skin color. She told a story about how she had made a post on her social media about dreamcatchers and people were doubting that she had knowledge about it, which was frustrating to her. However, despite these experiences that she shared, Participant 5 still argued that there is less racism and more queerness now than in previous generations:

And I'm super glad that like, you know, as time has progressed and my generation is like, no, we ain't doing that no more. You know, we've got more LGBT representation. We have less racism, which let me tell you how much fun it is to correct a Boomer when they say, "Oh, racism isn't a thing anymore." Like, really,

really, really, really, really? Okay. But yeah, it's just you know, we're the gayest generation and we're going to make everybody gayer. It's great." (Participant 5)

While filled with witty quips, she highlights the idea that more extreme racism is a generational thing, even going as far as to say "we have less racism." This ideology is something that is put forward often, and dismisses the responsibility and onus on anti-racist work that needs to be done in younger generations as well. This was something that Participant 6 started to hit at the nuance of in their response. Within the interview, their focus when talking about whiteness was how it affects them as an academic and a college instructor.

I have a lot more problems with interaction with other white queers who think that I'm going to be their ally and stuff around racism. But like, as an instructor, white queer men don't want to talk about race. They're like, well, I have to deal with homophobia. Like it's the same thing. And I'm like, it's not. And let's discuss that. And I find that white queers are often very disappointed in me because I refuse to be their ally in terms of racism. And often ableist. (Participant 6)

In this passage, Participant 6, who is white and queer, highlights the notion of how white queers often expect them to not challenge them along the lines of race and racism, and especially how "white queer men don't want to talk about race." There is the idea that because they are white, that Participant 6 will not challenge white students on their racism, because they expect there to be this racist alliance along the lines of white supremacy to uphold their white privilege. In particular, this is often a struggle for white queer men to work through because, as mentioned in this excerpt, the claim of homophobia being "the same thing," flattens how oppression and privilege function by trying to essentialize homophobia as the same as racism or even ableism, as they mention as well.

As a white queer, I notice in my own interactions with other white queers. While I do not find myself in social situations with people who are vehemently and explicitly racist, that does not mean that problematic moments do not arise. Since whiteness (and white supremacy)

function invisibly, and thrive under a lack of communication or discussion of race, unless it is specifically brought up, many times white queers do not consider the impact of race. I think about the amount of times other white queers have told me that “not everything is about race,” when I do challenge them to consider a perspective beyond their own. Statements like that only further emphasize that queerness is not a blanket understanding of oppression or a “get-out-of-talking-about-race” card.

Throughout the interview, class was the biggest point of discussion for Participant 7, and her experiences growing up as a “poor white person,” were influential in her understandings about race. She talked about how she could find herself in representation in terms of her whiteness, but that “being poor and growing up poor also compounds that.” Here was her working through of some of this within the interview:

I think whiteness is a big reason why a lot of things don't have to be the end all be all for me. So like, it mitigates or because I'm still seen as like, the success, like I can still find a lot of myself and how like, in representation like across the board I can usually find at least like...25 other white women who are like in the same article or the same whatever...I think that has also given me the ability to talk like, with people that I think people who aren't white, people of color, like I'm accepted more readily, I think, because of my whiteness in all the different areas. I think being poor and growing up poor also compounds that, though, because I'm not like a middle class white lady...I think just like, whiteness and poorness also are just like, two of the things that are two parts of my identity that I think of most often.

As she mentions in this passage, she acknowledges the impact of her whiteness in a lot of areas of her life, as well as how her whiteness likely “mitigates” a lot of situations, in that even if she is not completely proximal to privilege, she is still deemed a “success” because she is white. She also brings up that due to her whiteness, she has greater access to seeing people who look like her in a variety of settings. However, she draws attention to how class and “poorness” affect her access to privilege. As she mentions here, “whiteness and poorness also are just like, two of the

things that are two parts of my identity that I think of most often,” which was apparent as we chatted. In conversation about desire, attraction, aesthetic, gender and sexuality, she clearly used that lens to interpret and answer the questions.

It was also significant to note that Participant 7 was one of the only participants who repeatedly brought up class; as she mentions in this in-depth excerpt, it is a large part of her consciousness. The only other times that class was brought up during the interviews was when Participant 4 discussed how she felt fortunate to be able to live alone, and how that was a marker of middle-class to her, and Participant 1’s mention of being raised middle class. This is an example of how class privilege can also function invisibly but have a large impact.

Again, while not all participants were as interrogative about their whiteness as they may have been their fatphobia or gender, there was some discussion about how whiteness and racedness factors into the way that their bodies are granted access to spaces, even alongside of their fatness. However, just as one’s queerness does not automatically mean that one is oppressed, different aspects of fatness and different sizes of bodies experience different privileges and difficulties.

Degrees of Fatness and Privilege. While being fat is typically not something that is equated with privilege, there are aspects of how one experiences their fatness that might render their experience more privileged than another fat person. As mentioned in the previous section, whiteness complicates fat experience in terms of whose bodies are represented, whose bodies are seen, and whose bodies are considered still proximal to privilege; fatness or queerness does not erase one’s white privilege. Nor does queerness erase other forms of privilege, as mentioned by Participant 4:

And just in the same way that queerness does not absolve people of their racism, queerness does not absolve people of their fatphobia and their fat hate and their

fat shame. And you know, I want to be careful about co-opting that movement. They're different.

This is an important point that came up, particularly with Participants 3 and 4, in terms of acknowledging how often challenging fatphobia is not always considered part of a critical consciousness. Folks can utilize their queerness, or their experiences with homophobia, as an excuse to get out of examining other areas where they are privileged. While Participant 4 makes sure to not equate racism and fatphobia, she does draw attention to the way(s) that fatphobia operates as a systemic form of oppression that manifests within the everyday and interpersonal interactions as well as within structures.

Additionally, *how* fat one is impacts their access to people, places and things. Ash of @thefatlippodcast shared the spectrum of fatness, which ranges from small fats, who typically wear size 1-2x, to infinifat, who wear size 6x and higher. Folks on the smaller fat end of the spectrum tend to not experience the same types of everyday realities as folks who are 6x.

Participant 3 elaborated on this spectrum:

I describe my body as fat. And Ash from the Fat Lip podcasts created kind of like this quadrant of what your fatness might be in terms of like the galaxy of fatness and I think that I am like a medium fat, whereas, like, I can still somewhat shop in stores, but I'm really like stuck to online shopping and navigating spaces is really hard, like airports, airplanes, buses, public eateries, those kinds of things like, I feel less and less trusting of structures the fatter I get.

According to the spectrum of fatness, that places Participant 3 as a 3x, which means that some clothing lines still include plus up to their size, but they are excluded from shopping at many stores, and many plus size "accommodations" that are made (such as larger seating) are either uncomfortable or do not fit their body. However, they can still likely find some clothes and not worry as much about things such as a seatbelt fitting across their lap. It is in these daily interactions, the quotidian engagement, where the privilege in terms of body size becomes

apparent. When you go out, are you able to not worry about breaking a seat, or fitting into seating? Are you able to carpool with your friends and be guaranteed to be able to buckle yourself into a seat? Are you able to find clothes that are not prohibitably expensive and that at least allow you to resemble the sense of style you are going for? Are you able to fly without worrying that the airline might kick you off or charge you for another seat? Are you able to grocery shop without being judged for the contents of your cart? These were all places of concern that were brought up by many of the participants, or places where they have experienced stress or struggle.

For example, I think about the time I broke my friend's car. It was not his entire car, but as I stepped out of his passenger seat, I slipped, and my full weight came down on the siding between the door and the body of the car. It separated from the body and snapped. He assured me that he was not worried, it was fixable with some gorilla glue, he was more concerned about how I was feeling, but I instantly went to a self-loathing place. I doubt that thinner folks, and even folks on the smaller end of the fat quadrant, consider whether their body could potentially break someone's car. Until that moment, I had not either; chairs are the usual worry. But from that moment on, I started to question every single surface I touched, every single structure I interacted with.

It is important to notice the use of the word structures within Participant 3's share on the previous page: bodies are deprived access to spaces based on how structures have formed and constructed spaces and places, both discursively and physically. The importance of this distinction in this section, while talking about fatness and privilege, is to note that since Participant 4 is medium fat, they get more access to spaces than someone who is infinifat (towards the larger end of the fat quadrant) might. While both of them likely experience

fatphobia from people and structures, the amount of access that someone who is on the bigger side of the fat spectrum might get could be significantly reduced, especially compared to someone who is a small fat, or wearing a size 1-2x.

For example, Participant 2, who appears to be on the smaller fat end of the spectrum, discussed how her body has changed from going to the gym over the last year, but what that translates to is that she has lost weight, whether intentionally or unintentionally. While she does acknowledge that her body has changed in the way it takes up space, she does not necessarily acknowledge the privileges that she might be granted access to being in a smaller fat body in terms of fitting into spaces, dating, healthcare, shopping for clothing, and so on, or how the access her body now receives differs from prior to her gym involvement. This was a consistent mention within the interview with Participant 2 about how her body has shifted and how that's been a source of conflict for her. She does not entirely feel like she can claim "fat" in the same way she did before, and feels that she does not fit in completely into where she would like to in terms of body and queerness. This will be elaborated on in the final theme of this chapter, however she does not always make acknowledgement about how her white femininity and smaller fatness impact her reality in privileging ways, such as in finding romantic partners, travel, seating, and so forth, as was evident throughout the interview.

I do not aim to downplay the discrimination or fatphobic experiences that Participant 2 might receive, or the ways that her body is still not perceived as "normative." Instead, I seek to challenge the idea that all fatness is the same, or that all fat experience is the same. There are similarities across experience, as evidenced in this dissertation, and there are stereotypes and structural limitations that operate on blanket fatphobia, but the way(s) those stereotypes and structures are enacted upon bodies differs. For example, a couple of the participants noted that

when they are smaller, they receive more privilege, more attention, more access to clothes, care, compliments and attention when they are on the smaller side of fatness. Participant 4 talked at length during her interview, particularly around how when she's smaller she gets more "play" (sexual attention), but also about how being a smaller size affects her emotionally:

...when I'm a smaller size, I have a lot of privilege in fatness. And then that privilege moves as my body gets bigger, and then I feel bad, not because, not like, it's so hard to know where the bad feels are coming from, because some of it is like, "Oh, this is fatphobia and this is me hating my body for being bigger." And some of it's like, my body, it's just larger. It's harder. It's harder to buy clothes. It's harder to find the things that fit. It's harder to feel like I look good. It's harder...And so like, so I feel bad about feeling bad about feeling bad. And then I feel shame. And then that shame, I internalize the shame and feel gross about it.

In this passage, she hits at some of the ways that an increase in size decreases one's privilege in being able to do things such as buy clothes, and buy clothes that they like and that fit. Because Participant 4 was someone who does a lot of work on self-betterment and radical self-love, she talked about shame a lot throughout her interview. In this above section, she names fatphobia as being part of that struggle, but then she "feels bad about feeling bad" because she knows that those bad feelings don't solve fatphobia or her own image struggles and they lead to shame. This was where Participant 4 really struggled with articulating her desire for weight loss as well; she did not want to approach that from a place of shame or perpetuating fatphobia, but still felt like she wanted avenues to be able to speak about that in ways that acknowledged smaller fat privilege and individual choice within the context of structural inequalities.

In the same way that queer folks are not exempt from perpetuating problematic discourses, particularly around race, sexuality, and gender, folks of size are not exempt from perpetuating these ideas of thin(ner) privilege. Being oppressed in one area does not mean you cannot oppress others in another; your oppression does not exempt you from perpetuating other forms of harm. Participant 3 tells a story about listening to a podcast and realizing a fat comedian

that they like is partnered with someone who is fairly conventionally and hegemonically deemed attractive, and how frustrating that was for them to hear:

And so, I think a lot of that queerness that I think about like, wanting is a lot of the mainstream queerness or the general queerness. Like I was listening to a podcast and there was a fat comedian and she was explaining her partner, and I went to go look what her partner looked like, and sure enough, it was a thin, blonde woman. And I was like, “Come on!” I understand that you don’t have the choice of like, who we fall in love with, but like, could you? Could you have the choice? Could you make it more explicit that you were going to try out different types, like you were going to try being less centered in your white supremacy? Because white supremacy is not something that’s just like, you invoke it or not, like it’s also there subconsciously. So, like, when I think of queer spaces that are like, “We’re diverse,” but the diversity is not really accurately in practice, it’s just like a good place to say like, “we’re diverse” so you can get more people to come in and party. And just like try. Try harder.

In this passage, they discuss how they struggle because they want some of that access to “mainstream queerness,” but they know that it is not in line with how they value their body and their community. Hearing that this comedian was partnered with a thinner blonde woman was incredibly frustrating for them, because to them it signals a buying in to white supremacy as well as fatphobia.

In the next subtheme of this section I extend this analysis on privilege, looking at the ways that fatphobia can and does make itself manifest within the responses of the participants. In particular, I look at how internalized fatphobia can significantly affect sense of self, one’s relationship to others, as well as sense of understanding one’s privilege. Privilege is often a hard thing to see, because structures operate in a way that renders privilege invisible, especially to those who carry it. However, as is discussed, several participants were honest about the ways in which they perpetuate aspects of fatphobia and fat hate, even while being fat themselves.

Internalized Fatphobia. Because we live in a fatphobic society, one has to work through fear, hatred, and shame around larger bodies, which is often not a linear or complete process.

Even the most vocally, politically and proud fat of my participants still struggled with aspects of fatphobia. Some of the participants explicitly pointed out moments where their own internalized notions of fatphobia and fat bodies came into their thinking, and others were not as specific in naming it, or potentially even aware of it. However, it was apparent through the interviews that fatphobia affects sense of self, relationships, and how one communicates about their body.

Participant 6 was very open about discussing the ways they're trying to work through and are influenced by fatphobia, and was even specific about naming it as fatphobia within their interview. One of the examples they gave as an instance of their own fatphobia was when they are talking to someone that they think is attractive, they are less likely to use the word fat. They stated how ridiculous that also is: "... like outing myself as fat. Like suddenly that's going to be the thing that they'll see. It's now I've said the word, now they'll see that I'm fat. And how silly that is. But it's still there." Because the word "fat" carries such a negative connotation for many within larger societal spaces, this is hinting at the trope that being fat means one is not beautiful or attractive, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, as well as the idea that fat is not desirable on yourself or others. They note that while it is "ridiculous," to "out" themselves as fat, they still worry that if they use the word fat, that they will suddenly be seen as less attractive. For some, this struggle to name one's body as fat to others is to draw attention to one's body in ways that might not be comfortable or desired. As Participant 6 is hitting at in this instance, it's ridiculous that "suddenly that's the thing that they'll see," but as evidenced throughout the contributions of the participants discussed in this chapter, it is clear that larger bodies are either hypervisible and the subject of conversation (such as the "obesity epidemic") or are not brought up at all, rendering them less visible or a least visibly named.

Often using the word fat can be tricky or intimidating, given the connotations that go along with the word, especially in terms of using it in front of other people, such as in Participant 6's example above. I think about how I have negotiated the word fat in my own dating profiles/experiences. In the past I, have used the word curvy, or mentioned something about requiring a partner to be into folks of size, but I also do not always use the word fat. After this conversation with Participant 6 I changed my profiles to include the word fat on all of them. During our interview, Participant 6 noted that this mindset about fat affects them in terms of how they see partners' bodies, too, and how they still have to work through the negative connotations and internalized fatphobia they have in terms of which bodies they find attractive, both for self and others. When asked specifically what types of people and bodies they tend to be attracted to, they responded with

Probably what is considered traditionally masculine and traditional, and even with women really athletic and when I mean athletic, I mean toned, muscular. And like, I know when different partners have gained weight, like was hard for me. But I also wonder how much of that is internalized fatphobia.

I appreciated their honesty with their reflection, acknowledging that even when their partners have gained weight that they struggled with their attraction for them. While not a direct correlation, the idea of seeking a partner who is "athletic" is similar to the way that "seeking a fit partner" could be coded in that it emphasizes seeking someone who is thinner. Throughout the interview, because Participant 6 identified so strongly with athletic culture and being an athlete, their body being larger was hard for them in terms of how fat tangibly felt on their frame, and in terms of the limitations more fat placed on their movement. But this identification with athletic culture is one of the reasons why they mention preferring more masculine and athletic women, and why they were attracted to their current partner of 11 years, who is an athlete.

Even for Participant 3, the most vocally fat positive interviewee, they noticed that they tend to end up also being more attracted to smaller bodies than theirs:

But also like, for some reason, when it comes to more femme presenting folks, I seem to gravitate more towards smaller bodies than mine. And I don't know if that's because I want, like, I have this idea that like being fat I should be, I'm more masculine and so then I'll be the bigger person in a relationship, you know, when it comes to a more femme presenting person. But then when it's more of a masc person, I like to be the smaller person in the relationship. So, I think it's very hegemonic understanding of what I need from body size. And that's something that I'm trying to work through, too.

As they theorize here, potentially part of this attraction towards bodies that are smaller than theirs is due to the way that larger bodies are masculinized. Because larger bodies tend to be rendered more masculine, if they are engaging with someone who is more femme presenting, they “gravitate more towards smaller bodies” than theirs. However, if they are in a relationship with a more masculine person, they tend to want to be the smaller body in the relationship. As mentioned above, this reflects “a very hegemonic understanding of what I need from body size,” but that they are also working through that. This also reflects concerns about how queerness can easily replicate assimilationist and heteronormative ideas in terms of relational pairings and attraction, which will be discussed in the last section in this chapter in more detail.

Similarly, Participant 5 reflected on what it's been like for her as a larger woman trying to date “bigger women,” and how often she has a harder time finding women who are interested in dating her than men.

I find more women, like women are less likely to date a bigger girl for some reason. And least, I've found that when I try to date women that I've found that are interested in bigger women, which is fine because, you know, that's kind of what I'm into. But at the same time, you know, there's less people who are more interested in bigger girls, in females.

As was speculated by Participant 3 about how they tend towards femme bodies that are smaller than them because they like to be the bigger body in the relationship, this seems to be something

that Participant 5 may be experiencing as well. Throughout the interview with Participant 5, she mentioned being frustrated about how easy it was often to find men that were attracted to larger women, but that she had a harder time finding women who felt the same way. This was especially frustrating because she herself is attracted to “bigger women,” but they are often not as attracted to her as she is to them, perhaps due to an extension of internalized fatphobia in the larger women that she seeks to date. I shared with her that this was an experience I could also relate with; I am attracted or seek out women and queer folks whose bodies look more like mine, but sometimes that is met with antagonism or simply a lack of interest, again, perhaps due to some internalized fatphobia.

Several folks mentioned that they still struggle with being called fat or what fat means for them, especially because of experiences when they were younger. Participant 8 also discussed the loaded history of using the word fat for herself, since it was an insult hurled at her in her youth.

I think because of my experience growing up, and fat being a negative connotation, in some ways it's negative. But at the same time, the academic in me and knowing reclaiming the word it's important. And so like, I can, it's difficult sometimes for me to reframe it as positive change. But at the same time, I understand why and I can do that... And it's a little bit different, and that's just based on growing up and being called fat being negative so much in my life.

This was a common sentiment for the participants who were academics or who engaged in critical work; they understood the importance of a reclamation, but were not necessarily able to fully do that for themselves, due to prior experiences as well as negative connotations with the word. Nearly every participant had a negative experience with the word “fat” when they were younger, or has experienced it being hurled at them for less-than-positive reasons. Participant 1 expressed similar sentiments about how she struggled to relate to larger bodies when she was younger:

When I was younger and I was smaller, but more preoccupied with my weight, I had a lot of trouble being around people who were larger than me because genetically I'm pretty predisposed to be large and I didn't want that to be a thing. So, I would want to avoid people who looked in that way.

What's interesting about this quote is that she talks about how she knew there was a likelihood that she would be larger, due to her genetics, and so because of that she avoided people who were larger. Part of that was fear in that she would look like them, as well as the ways that larger bodies are treated. While Participant 1 mentioned having a partner that found her attractive, and for her that seemed to be a marker of her bodily success, she still struggles with being queer and a person of size:

...I don't know if people are gonna find me attractive, especially because queerness is so associated with like, high fashion these days. And things that are fashionable tends to be not on larger bodies and larger bodies don't tend to be seen as fashionable.

It was apparent throughout the interview that Participant 1 clearly struggles with her size and seeing it as something positive. When asked how she thought others would describe her, she thought they might use words like curvy, or chubby, but she would rather they "Just say I'm fat. Like, it's, I'm not delusional. So, it's not my favorite word to hear, but I am also still going to use it because otherwise it feels like I am trying to gently sugarcoat over any unpleasant aspect of my life. In this statement, she specifically refers to her size as unpleasant, and it was clearly something that she still feels and reckons with on a daily basis.

Even others' internalized fatphobia or the messages that they receive about fat bodies affected the participants. For example, Participant 5, who strongly identified with being a mother as being a huge part of her ascribed and avowed identity, shared how her ex tells their son that she (Participant 5) is fat, and that that is bad and unhealthy:

My son seems to think that if he tells me that I'm fat and that I'm unhealthy enough that I will get healthy. And I keep telling him, "Bud, that's just a

descriptor word. It's not, it has no measure of who I am as a person. It's just a descriptor. And you know, you're not, your dad is not going to shame me into being anybody else than who I am.

And while she works hard to educate her son on the reasons why shaming her into "health" will not work, and is not based in a place of care, she mentions that this type of fat shaming is not limited to her son and her ex.

It really just depends on who the person is. If they're trying to shame me or put me down, then it's usually focus on my body type. "Oh, well you're fat and you're, you've got a double chin." And I'm like, "Yeah, I do! That's two chins that don't like you, what?"

Throughout the interview Participant 5 mentioned how her "incredible confidence" was something that allowed her to provide care for other folks who might not receive "as much support and love because of the way they look, which is just a damn shame." She appeared to have spent a lot of time working on her internalized fatphobia, or at least she did not present any super obvious struggles with that over the course of the interview.

Concluding Thoughts on Theme Two

As has been mentioned throughout this chapter, body size is just one aspect of how one navigates the world, space, place and relationships. While there are multiple factors and aspects of privilege that function within the lives and responses of the participants, there are also parts of their identities that are nuanced and complicated. Specifically, this section provided insight into how privilege and oppression can function simultaneously, particularly along the lines of race, body size, and queerness. As queer fat women or genderqueer folks, the participants experience structural inequalities on several levels. However, for most of my participants who are white, their whiteness functions to keep them in a place of privilege. Some of them also carry class privilege, generational wealth, access to care, employment, and travel. Others are unable to be out at work or receive adequate access to medical care. Some even have some privilege within

their fat embodiment, in terms of *how* fat they are and the ramifications of that for their daily lives. This nuance in understanding again, that not all fat experience is the same, and that quotidian fat embodiment does not look the same.

In the first sub-theme, The Invisibility of White Femininity, it was clear that, especially given the racial composition of the study population, race was often something that functioned invisibly; a “nonidentity” (McRuer, 2005). White folks are often not constructed as racialized, due to the way(s) that whiteness functions invisibly in perpetuating norms and values that privilege white people and white bodies. As Carillo-Rowe (2000) states, there is “discursive formation that secures white privilege within particular contexts through two interdependent rhetorical moves: the universalization of “White” as an “unraced” social location and the deflection of critical gaze” (p. 65). In addition to the invisibility of whiteness, there was also framing, though not explicitly stated in most cases, about size being seen as a departure from white feminine ideas of control. The deflection of criticism, and in this case fatness is rendered a criticism, represents an individual, moral failing of what the “ideal” white body is supposed to represent. Already removed from heterosexuality, in terms of the patriarchal (re)productions of the ideal, participants discussed not feeling like they fit in with the “ideal” (read: white feminine) construction of what it meant to “be a lady.”

However, because talking about oppression and privilege not always simple, this conversation expanded into the second sub-theme, Degrees of Fatness and Privilege. In this section, one of the points that was raised by a couple of participants is the idea that fatphobia does not always get included in our conversations about privilege or critical consciousness. In other words, fatphobia is still seen as acceptable in some ways that other types of discrimination are not. Within this, the emphasis on the impact of structures was significant. Fatphobia is a

cultural and structural issue, not solely an individual one. These structural limitations, such as not being able to access certain spaces, places, and services, are also not experienced universally in the same way by all fat bodies. As was mentioned in this section earlier, smaller fat bodies get more attention and privileges; an increase in size represents a decrease in privilege.

Lastly, in the final section, Internalized Fatphobia, it was clear that the participants, even those who strongly identified with the word fat as part of their description of who they were, still struggled with it. It was clear that the word fat is still a loaded term, and participants still carry the weight of past engagements with it, such as it being used as an insult. As mentioned in the first theme, fatphobia affects whose bodies are seen as attractive, and this was reiterated within this section as well. Some of the participants even noted how their own fatphobia functions in how they see their partners, as well as their own bodies, as attractive or desirable. However, for the participants who identified with bisexuality, many of them noted that it was easier to find men who were into women of size than it was to find other women who were similarly interested. This could be argued as another way that internalized fatphobia functions, particularly for queer women.

As I reflected on this section, just as my fatness and queerness cannot be separated, neither can my whiteness. My experiences with desire, queer community, embodiment and privilege are always already viewed through the lens of whiteness, as well as my understanding of fat and queer identity. Within these interviews, my whiteness functioned invisibly, whereas my fatness was more obviously visible, both in terms of how whiteness structurally operates invisibly, and the fact that I was the fattest person involved in my dissertation. I know that there also are privileges that are associated with smaller embodiments, and even smaller embodiment within the fat community. Internalized fatphobia is not something that I, nor my participants, are

exempt from, and I was challenged both in the writing of this section as well as in the interviews, to consider the way(s) in which I might still have some internalized fatphobia to dismantle

In the following section I consider how everyday identity performance for fat queer women is more complicated than simply body size, but rather is affected also by gender identity, others' perceptions, relationality, and how one operationalizes what their queer and/or fat identity means.

Everyday identity performance

In this section I consider the three following themes: 1) Queer failures and successes, 2) relational understandings of queerness, and 3) queer and fat as a political choice. Through these themes I consider the ways that performances of self and identity are made through aesthetic, relational and political choices. Particularly, I reflect on the ways that performative choices can lead to notions of (queer) failure or success and notions of what counts as "enough." I begin this section with the discussion of failure and success because it was something that was brought up by every participant throughout the course of their interviews.

Queer Failures & Successes. Nearly every participant also echoed a similar struggle about being perceived and read how they want to be in regards to their gender and sexuality performances. Because most of the participants identify with being femme or with femininity in some way, there was a lot of exasperation at not being able to dress or appear in a way that would get them read as more "visibly queer." Particularly, many expressed frustrations about the signaling of gender and sexuality performance through aesthetic choices, such as clothing and hair. Some of the choices that they made reflected successful conveyance of their identity and queerness, while others were deemed more failures or a departure from where they truly felt best and seen.

As discussed in the first and second themes, the butch-femme dichotomy creates difficulty for participants in terms of their own gender and sexuality presentation. For example, when talking about her struggle to realize her attraction to femme women, one participant mentioned, “I thought butch lesbians are the only true gays” (Participant 7). In addition to attraction, that sort of internalization of the masculine-of-center embodiment for queer women means that queer women often feel pressure to perform a certain type of embodiment to be seen as valid. Because that masculine ideal gets more attention, femmes and other-identified queer folks may try to embody something that does not fit them in order to feel seen. Participant 2, who recently came to understand herself as queer, discusses the evolution of her performance of gender and sexuality.

...when I was first starting to kind of coming to know myself as queer, I was like, I cut my hair like super short. And I like, wore a lot more like, I don't know if I would term it androgynous, but less like, typically feminine kind of clothes and stuff like that, not a lot of makeup. And then kind of over the past few years, it's evolved into more what feels like me, just like, kind of a combination of both... I have like long hair now and I don't know what exactly has caused that shift. I haven't... I sometimes think about like, the performance, but I feel for the most part, a lot of times it's just what feels right.

As she articulates, initially Participant 2 made specific, intentional choices to present as less feminine because she wanted to be seen as queer. Being seen as queer, for many LBQT women, means specific aesthetic signals, such as more masculine/androgynous clothing, less makeup, and short hair. Although she shifted into a presentation that feels right for her, the struggle for visibility is a constant one, and one that she worries about in terms of not looking “super gay.” Gender and sexuality performance carries significant political signaling to her as well, because she doesn't want to be read as a “a straight girl, like appropriating space or whatever.”

Hair was one of the big mentions for many participants, as they discussed either expectations of how they thought their hair should be to be read as queer or how they wanted

their hair to be. There was common agreement that lesbians and queer women are often associated with shorter hair, or hair that is less conventionally “feminine,” which was a point of cognitive dissonance for several of the interviewees. Even when talking about bodies of people they find attractive, many of the participants noted being attracted to butches, “everyone loves a good butch” or that having shorter hair is associated with more queer credibility, such as getting “the nod.” Participant 6 talked about their journey with their appearance, and in particular their hair over time: “I think hair is a really main component. I have long hair right now, so I am femme, from others’ perspectives.” They had mentioned about coming out and being surrounded by rugby dykes and so they engaged in particular aesthetic choices around hair, such as shaving their head, and so they’ve experienced a variety of reactions from others in terms of their appearance.

When I first came out, I always say I was raised by rugby dykes and drag queens. I was in the queer bar every night, but I was also playing rugby, and they were like, you have to shave your head and you have to like, this is what we look like. And I was like, oh, okay... And I went from looking really femme to really butch and becoming kind of an asshole. Like, really trying to embody... so it’s been a lot of messiness and finding comfort...

...I used to have a buzz cut. And it was kind of like, you would, there was something that you were all there together in this, and I miss that. But that’s what I mean when I say, like that’s why I use masculine instead of like, when I say that the queer community, when you said mainstream and I said white, homonormative and masculine, because masculine women get more queer cred than someone who’s femme and genderqueer.

The pressure to try a different hair cut is real; shorter hair carries more queer capital. I even got a more “queer” haircut during the process of this dissertation; I shaved the whole bottom half for a dramatic undercut, though I can still wear my hair down with no real change in appearance. I noticed when I do share my undercut or wear my hair in a way that features it, I get very enthusiastic responses from other queers. It is nice to be recognized, however, this pressure to change and the desire to receive those enthusiastic responses can significantly impact folks in

terms of their understanding of their gender identity/performance. Participant 8 worries about how her gender performance gets read as someone presenting more feminine because “I don’t present myself in the way I think people think of queer.” Part of this she considers due to her race as well as her feminine presentation.

This lack of recognition, especially for femme folks, can be disheartening. Some of the participants mention growing into different understandings of their gender presentation, and how that changes how others interact with them. Participant 4 described negotiating her gender performance in this way:

Well, I think that my gender performance, because I am feminine, is pretty unobtrusive. And so like, when people argue about me, about being a dyke or not, that’s what they mean, you know? And so, I think my gender performance is nuanced and complicated and all on my terms. And at the same time, I know that I’m like totally, you know, being cisgendered like that I’m not you know, there’s a lot of stuff that I’m like, “Oh, that fits and it’s cool and I like it.” And it just happens to not rock any boats. So. So, I think that my, I think my gender presentation makes it easier for me to push the margins and to get people to move things. And I like it, you know?

She elaborated in the interview by saying that because she is a sexuality educator, having a softer, more feminine and approachable appearance allows for her to have conversations with people about topics that might be considered taboo. Because of that, she uses being read as “sweet” and feminine to “push the margins and get people to move things.”

In addition to not being read as queer enough, participants also vocalized struggle over whether it was appropriate to identify as fat; whether they were “fat enough,” to claim that label. For one participant, her fluctuating body has challenged her perception of herself.

I consider myself like a fat person, but my body has been like, changing over the last year... and so, I felt in the past few months some like, tensions around like, should I really call myself a fat person if I’m not like as big as I was? Like, I’m still wearing plus size clothes and everything, but like, I’m like, as I said, more like a smaller fat person, nor like actually a small fat because I’m still bigger than that (Participant 2)

While notions of fatness should, in theory, enable people to challenge notions of binaries and essentializing, due to the flux and fluidity of how bodies exist, often just as with other aspects of identity, people get placed into binaries. Even the fat spectrum talked about within this chapter and used by the fat community, essentially reifies a binary. Many participants feel stuck as to how to identify themselves when there is such a binary: “There’s fat and there’s thin and there’s not a lot of like, in between. Like, if you’re not thin, or if you’re not like this, like, ideal, then you’re the other thing” (Participant 2). She feels conflict over this middle ground and a seeming sense of loss of identity, not feeling able to fully claim one or the other. In a similar vein, Participant 6 discussed how being athletic and active has been a main component of their identity throughout their life. They talked about how often because of the body that they are in now, they are assumed to not be able to move or be athletic and that being a frustrating space to be placed into.

“Not being enough” or “being too much” were also very common sentiments expressed by participants across the board, not just in terms of fatness and queerness.. Being in a liminal space in terms of reception of and understanding of identity was particularly common for two of the participants who also describe themselves as genderqueer.

I have trouble sometimes because I feel really genderqueer. I mean, I identify as genderqueer, but what that means, too, in community is sometimes when I hang with like, groups of lesbians, it ends up being that never, I’m not femme or I’m not enough butch. And I’m like, yeah I really like Magic Mike because Channing Tatum is super hot. Like, he just is. And then they’re like, what? There’s like disgust. And then I’m also like, well, can we maybe not have disgust for men? Which sounds so funny coming out of my mouth. Can we maybe not also just treat it like I say, I feel like a lot of responses in lesbian communities ends up being really transphobic. There are trans lesbians, or lesbians who are trans women, but like this sudden urge to be like, men are fucking disgusting. I’m like, you don’t know who’s sitting around you. You don’t know. And putting everything in terms of bodies is really tough for me.

For Participant 6, quoted above, being genderqueer often renders them an outsider in queer spaces. Earlier in this chapter I included how they talked about struggling with gendered spaces, and this is an extension of that. Again, because they do not feel butch enough for the lesbians or as man-hating as they've experienced some lesbian circles to be, they don't completely fit in, even though they often get placed into lesbian circles because of their current relationship configuration.

This is something I've struggled with, too. Being too much in terms of body size, in terms of politics, in terms of self-acceptance; all were also brought up by participants. For folks that identified as bisexual in some form (87.5%, 7/8 participants), this was particularly salient. Participant 7, who is bisexual, has had a particularly hard time finding a gender presentation that fits her or one that makes her fit in. She still often feels outside of queer community, and especially queer women's community.

So since, for me, like my gender and my sexual orientation have like, really tied together, and in that, because I came out so hard as like a butch lesbian, like sweater vest, like the whole thing, just like, you know, it was a situation, which was the only way I felt like I could perform, like and be like, I'm gay... when I started incorporating more femme type clothing or actions or like makeup or whatever, I genuinely did feel like for a while that I was performing drag because I was so, I felt like I wasn't, because I wasn't straight, I couldn't be femme. And there's a lot caught up into that, and a lot of that was just like femme for me is a very vulnerable identity that's scary and can like, I face more dangers when I have, I feel like I face different and deeper dangers when I'm performing as femme versus when I'm performing as butch. And so, for me, that is a lot of how like, I'll interact in a space, of just like my safety... I'm femme and it like hurts.

During the interview, she talked about how her choice to dress and identify as a butch lesbian when she first came out was a multi-faceted decision. Part of it was a class issue; the more masculine clothes were cheaper and easier to find secondhand and in ways that fit her body at the time. Another reason she said was that "I thought butch lesbians are the only true gays." In order

to feel valid in her sexuality, she felt the need to perform as more butch. In this passage, she talks about the struggle she had to even begin to feel comfortable in “more femme type clothing or actions,” and that she felt, “because I wasn’t straight, I couldn’t be femme.” She also talked during the interview, as hinted at in the above-quoted passage, that her gender identity is also affected by how safe she feels in a space, and depending on what she needs to face within a particular context, she might choose to be gendered one way over another. However, later she went on to talk about how others would likely still describe her in a particular way:

Most people would still describe me butch more than anything, which makes me sad, but also like, because I’m a handy femme, which is like, a very specific type of femme... how I identify as a queer woman is very different than how people see me as a queer woman. A part of that is a lot of hurt that I internalize for not being seen as like, who I identify. Like a lot of assumptions and also, just like, yeah, like a failure. Like, I’m not a typical femme. I’m not butch.

While she does appreciate that others read her as queer, she feels disheartened to not be read in the ways that she wants. In this passage, she commented on a particularly poignant point about how because her identity is not perceived accurately by others, she feels like a failure in terms of the butch-femme binary. Participant 4 also talked about how certain markers of queerness are also usually associated with failures of femininity, or, in her words, “punishable offenses:”

Letting myself go. Oh, you know, like the choice to like, not wear makeup. The choice to have hairy legs. Like, the choice to not hide all the hair that comes onto my chin. Right? Like. Like those sorts of things are really strong visual indicators of queerness, in a way that’s actually, that is like, they’re punishable offenses. My body is a punishable offense.” (Participant 4)

For Participant 4, who has been visibly out and involved actively in queer community since her late teens into her forties, she discussed the decades of experience and experimentation that she has had around her gender performance, from “being your friendly, neighborhood queer punk,” to becoming a little more “chilled out,” in how she presents herself, it has been a journey. But she talks about the importance of being “fuck you gay,” at one point in her life:

...I had a partner who called it like, look at you. Look at me, you know, like you see the people and they're wearing like, so many items of clothing saying, "Look at me!" You know, and that for me, being look at me gay was a really important thing for me to be seen because one, I wanted to be seen and welcomed into my community. But also, I really wanted to, I wanted to suss out if someone was gonna be a problem right away. So, it gave me more power when I was, when I was very disempowered and when I was very young and poor and queer and I didn't know if someone's going to hate me or cause me harm. By being punk and queer in a very external way, I feel like I was able to protect myself. And I was able to, I was able to, at the very least, in a world that hated me, have them hate me on my own terms, you know, and have them, have them hate me in a way that I could see their hate coming from a mile away because they couldn't miss me coming from a mile away.

She went on to elaborate more about what this shift has meant for her over time:

So now I think that I'm trying to strike more of a balance around my presentation and less of like... like I feel like in my 20s I was like "Fuck you, I'm queer." My 30s, I was like, "I'm still queer. Look at me. I can be normal and be queer." And now I'm like, I'm not normal, I'm not in your face. I'm just like, what do I even wear? And the answer is cowboy boots, you know?"

Participant 4 was the most reflexive in general, but especially in terms of her own understandings about gender performance and attraction. One of the astute moments brought up in her interview was the discussion about how a certain type of aesthetic, "short-haired people," gets praised within lesbian/queer circles.

And it's annoying because I also, I'm like critically looking and like this, like worship of masculinity, and I realized that like sometimes I personally set a really low, I have set a really low bar for short-haired people to like, get into a relationship with or vie for their attention, as if getting the attention from a cute short-haired person is like, is like it makes me worthy... And I don't wanna be like, "Butches are like this and femmes are like this." That's not true. But what I will say is for me personally, I realized that I had given a lot of social capital to people who look a very specific way. And I'm actually trying to like, reject that in my life.

This "worship of masculinity," as described by Participant 4 in the above excerpt, is something that leads people to make aesthetic choices to be seen, such as cutting their hair, as described earlier by Participant 2, even when that does not feel best to them, as well as putting up with

partners or giving “a lot of social capital” to folks who look a particular way. This worship of masculinity is also hard for a lot of folks because that is not how they see themselves and then they wonder if their gender performance will be seen as attractive to others or read in the way(s) that they want it to be. Participant 4 talks about the double-bind in her gender performance:

...if I see, like I think the femininity, presentation of femininity is so complicated, whereas like, if I see all their partners wear a lot of makeup, then I’ll be like, “Oh, I’m not pretty enough.” Like, it’s like, it’s easy to feel like I am not enough. I’m either too much or not enough in any given situation. And so, I’m either too much, or I’m too big or I’m too... And you know, too not femme enough or too femme or not high femme enough. And I’m not good at the kind of femininity that they’re the most attracted to. And so, I am a failure.

Two participants, Participant 6 and Participant 8, brought up how their disability affects their aesthetic choices and identity performance. Due to sensory issues, Participant 6 talked about having to wear different types of clothes than they used to and then they often would prefer in terms of visibility and being interpolated as queer. Participant 8 mentioned how her performance is impacted by her context, such as how “professional” she has to portray in a given setting, but also how significantly her disability is affecting her on any given day. “Being a woman who does like to dress up in heels and dresses and different things like that at times, but having a chronic illness, I can’t necessarily do that because the heels may hurt. I’m like, can’t wear these all day, you know?” So, for the two of them, despite how they may wish to present their gender identity through clothing choices, they are not always able to due to their disabilities.

During each of the interviews with Participant 6 and 8, I shared how I also struggle with physical sensation and aesthetic choices. Specifically, being a fatter body, I struggle with how pants literally feel on my body. They are often physically uncomfortable, and being so physically uncomfortable raises my anxiety and exacerbates my lack of focus, already difficult due to my

ADHD. While not reflective of how I see my gender identity, I end up presenting more feminine and wearing dresses, almost exclusively, due to the way that they physically feel on my body. Because of this, I often experience dissonance in how I see my own gender and with how my gender ends up being displayed through clothing choices. This is another instance of how binaries, such as butch-femme, straight-gay, can reinforce strict ideas about where people belong.

These binaristic conceptions which also frustrating for those that identified with bisexuality in some way, as they felt that they were either placed in the straight camp or the queer camp. As Participant 1 articulated,

Well, whenever I mention that I'm into girls, that gets overemphasized, I think, a lot of the time. So, I have friends who will just say I'm a lesbian, which I mean, primarily correct. But it's definitely like there's, there's options, you know, that are not just women that I also enjoy. And I think that... I'm definitely not performing butch. So, people wouldn't describe me in that way.

This overemphasis of her attraction to women is an attempt to categorize her as lesbian, even if that is not accurate for her, because it simplifies things. For Participant 5, the straight-gay binary both helps and hurts her. She mentions that she is able to pass as straight, and thereby fit into a heteronormative community if need be, but that she also can present as more queer and fit in there as well. However, this dual placement leaves her often feeling like she is not queer enough or straight enough for either community.

...I find that a lot of people are accepting of me because, you know, I am white presenting and you know, I can pass as straight. So, whether I'm in the queer community or in heteronormative communities, they, I tend to fit somewhere. But there's also the, "Well, are you really?" you know, kind of thing and so, that is kind of frightening. (Participant 5)

Earlier in the interview she mentions using queer as a way to simplify her identity and reduce the explaining that she often has to do. For Participant 3, who also does not embrace a binary of sexual attraction, they also articulate it as a way to simplify their explanations:

I do identify with queer because queer to me makes it feel like I don't have to explain. I mean, I do have to explain. But like it... ideally it feels like I don't have to explain who I like or who I'm attracted to. And I also have a rub with queerness, which is that like I feel with queerness I need to perform in a certain way and I'm not performing in a certain way to fit what the queer umbrella maybe wants or the people within the queer umbrella want.

While they find freedom in claiming queer, they also feel that there are certain performative expectations that go along with that. They went on to explain what that means and looks like for them as a fat queer person:

... so fat women, they are seen as undesirable and they are usually masculinized. I don't know if that's actually a word. But like, you know, they're made more masculine. And then with fat men, they're typically seen as more feminine. So, because I identify as like a fat woman, and there's like a question mark, because like, I feel kind of genderqueer, genderfluid at the moment. But like, because I identify as I feel like I have to turn up my gender performance of femininity to be read as 1) more desirable and 2) more unmarked. So, that maybe I can go through my day without a lot of fatphobia, if I perform a desired femininity. So, my gender performance to me feels very femme, and that's how I feel like I perform it as well, like, I feel very, I've really for a long time felt very like a sexualized person. I like sex. I enjoy being sexy, those things. So, I feel high femme in moments, but just like femme in general, and that's kind of how I portray my gender, too, is I like to play around with things. But it's kind of like a mix of masculine features and feminine features together.

In this passage, they articulate how they've come to understand their gender and their sexuality expression, both as the result of how they become codified by others as well as in ways to mitigate some aspects of fatphobia.

For many of the participants who expressed frustration at not being read in the way(s) that they hoped to or that accurately reflected their best sense of self, they also commented that if they are placed into certain places or relationships they may get constructed as queer. In other

words, when placed in relationship to people or place, the understanding of their identity shifts; they become visible in the context of others.

Relational understandings of queerness. For many participants, especially the participants who identified as bisexual in some form, not being read on their own, but rather being read through others as queer, was one of the more frustrating aspects of their queer experience. Because they identify as bisexual, also usually alongside of other identifiers such as “queer,” “asexual” and “demisexual,” often times they are not seen as queer enough, as mentioned earlier, but also not seen as queer unless they are with an “obviously” queer partner. Having an “obviously” queer partner lends some queer cultural capital to one’s identity that is not necessarily granted if one is single or solo. As someone who tends to be read as more feminine, this was something I could relate to across the board with my participants. I notice the way that being able to drop the word “girlfriend,” changes how people relate to me. I notice how when I hang around with friends who are more in line with the archetype of “the same five girls” that everyone is into (thin, short haired, more masculine), then I also get interpolated differently. There is something about being included and seen as queer that is validating, and so when it does not happen, it can be equally as frustrating.

This not being seen as queer unless partnered with someone visibly queer also extended to conversations about sexuality. For example, Participant 2 expressed significant frustration and sadness because her best friend often says to her that since she hasn’t had sex with women, she’s not “really” queer. While she tries to push back against this, it hurts her and she learns who she can go to about different sorts of issues. This is where she says she turns to her fat, queer friends for understanding. She does go on in the conversation to nuance this observation by considering her best friend’s positionality as a “thin, white, gay guy” who is financially mobile, pointing out

that he hasn't had remotely the same experiences she has had. Having to "prove" her queerness was one of the most challenging parts of the queer community for her:

And like, having to prove it both in terms of who you've slept with, not just who you're attracted to, but also like, how you, like I've mentioned, like perform that. And so like, if you're in a queer space and don't look like you're like, queer enough, then you're going to be counted as not. Like you're going to be put in the box of like, "not queer," based on how like, how you present.

This response brings up the question: Do you have to have queer sex to be queer? What even constitutes queer sex? For some of the bisexual participants, they were partnered with folks who identified as cis-men, or they typically looked more for partners who were masculine or male-identified. Because of this, they stated feeling less visible to other queer folks or not being seen as "validly" queer. Similarly, Participant 8, who also identifies as queer and bisexual, struggles with being read as queer when she is solo, but when she's with her partner, who presents more butch, it is more "noticeable from the outside" because there is a degree of masculinity and visible queer markers (short hair, minimal makeup, more masculine clothing and apparel choices). However, she notes that they are not always assumed to be together due to their racial differences, and in the past, some have even assumed her to be her partner's driver.

Gender performance, definitely just very feminine. Sexually, I think people automatically think I am heterosexual because I don't... I would say that I don't present myself in the way I think people think of queer. So, like, my partner, because she presents as butch because she wears suits and ties, her performance is definitely, her gender performance and her sexuality are both noticeable from the outside.

While we are relationally-constituted beings, many expressed frustration, especially given their performance(s) of femme or femininity that they are not seen as queer "from the outside," on their own, like Participant 8. However, while some of the participants are read as queer from the outside, the way that they are assumed to be queer is inaccurate to how they understand their self. This was especially true for folks who identified as genderqueer. Participant 6, who tends to

be partnered with folks who are very masculine, gets read as a lesbian by affiliation of their partner.

... I feel like genderqueerness is not really recognized when you're femme presenting. I don't have an anti-lesbian standpoint. I just, I don't want to be called one. And automatically, if you're in the queer community and you look like I do, you're probably lesbian.

They acknowledge that, the "people tend that I tend to have big crushes on or...I also like, I like masculinity. Like, I love it." When they are read as performing more femme, such as at the current moment, due to their longer hair, being partnered with someone who is masculine and a woman automatically puts them into that lesbian category. Even outside of the queer community, Participant 6 gets read in their queerness as "really out," because of their relationship to their partner.

I think that straight people see me as like really out because I hold my partner's hand. See how funny that is, that they see that as a really bold thing, because they're making out with their wives, like a lot of the men I know. I think that's pretty par for the course. I think people see me as pretty out.

Again, Participant 6 talks about because of how they relate to their partner, them holding their partner's hand automatically gets assumed to be political and gets assumed to be bold.

Participant 3, the other participant who identified as genderqueer also struggled with these notions of relational or performative understandings of queerness.

Because a lot of people don't do the work of saying who you date, who you fuck, who you're with does not change your sexuality or just not like curb the label to it. You know, that's making queerness so static when what we're trying to do all the time is making it more fluid. But then we want to push back into saying it has to look a certain way.

They struggled, as many participants did, with the desire to be seen as queer and to be read as queer, but not feeling like they should have to conform to a particular ideology or aesthetic to be seen as such. In other words, there was desire to embrace what is typically constructed as queer

expression with women, or folks' whose bodies are read and socialized as women, but a frustration with the pressure to have to conform to aesthetic choices that might be more visibly perceived as queer. Some of this frustration arose because of how each of the participants saw themselves as queer and what queer (or queering) meant to them.

Queer and Fat as a Political Choice: Because queer is such a varied and dynamic term, I asked participants to identify what queerness looks and feels like for them. All of the participants said they identified with the term queer in some way, whether that was in terms of sexuality or more politically-oriented definitions. Additionally, all of the participants used multiple descriptors to describe their queerness; the majority of the participants identified as queer and bisexual, with some identifying as lesbians, and some identifying as asexual or demisexual. But in regards to using the word, "queer," participants defined it in the following ways. Starting with Participant 1:

... to me, it's not just a personal identity, but it's also a way of interacting with the world where you're constantly working on making the familiar strange and asking questions about things that are taken for granted.

In this definition, they focus on the way that one might "queer" something, such as "making the familiar strange and asking questions about things that are taken for granted." For her, it is a process as well as an identity; a heuristic to engage with the world. She is not alone in this conception of queer; Participant 2 shared some similarities in her definition of what queerness means for her. However, she focused on queerness as different as the guiding concept in her definition:

Because for me it represents like, openness, and like, not having to like, be in one thing or other. Like, queer meaning something different, that's not like, hegemonic, kind of. And so, it helps me to be like, open and flexible and not feel like pinned down in like my sexuality.

For Participant 2, the duality and multiplicity that she can claim with the word queer is partly why she likes it; “it helps me to be like, open and flexible and not feel pinned down in like my sexuality.” As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Participant 2 often feels out of place in queer community or feels that she has not “performed” being queer enough because she has only slept with men. Using the term “queer” as opposed to bisexual or pansexual allows her to feel more fluid and more dynamic. This notion of fluidity was echoed by Participant 3:

I define it very particularly as queer and demisexual that like, I feel like I need to have some sort of established connection with somebody. I need to feel some sense of like, security or safety before I can go into like a sexual interaction with a person. And in terms of like, who it is that I’m attracted to, I feel like it’s pretty broad, which is why I like to use the term queer because I’ve been attracted to everybody in the gender universe

In this definition, Participant 3 connects it very specifically to their sexuality and attraction, combining their understanding of queerness with their demisexuality as well. They also nudge at notions of safety and comfort, which were attributes mentioned earlier by a couple of participants as to what they found beneficial about the queer community. Another important distinction here is the notion that using queer provides them space to be more inclusive in describing the identities of those they are attracted to and have connections with. This was one of the reasons that Participant 4 mentioned her shifting to using queer more as well, but also noting that for her it is a very intentional choice to use queer and one based on the context:

It’s very specific in, in context. So. So. I tend to think about the context of it. And it’s, it’s interesting because I think in my younger days I like, like I would, I would go with the identity that would make most of the people in the room more comfortable. And now, I will intentionally go with the identity that will make most of the people in the room more uncomfortable...

And queer as in a politic of difference. I talk so much about not conceding the center, but I’m like, there is, you know, there heteronormativity exists and queerness for me, is a rejection of heteronormativity, the idea that we should all be, that there’s a pathway to success and if we aren’t on it, we’re failing. And so, queerness is a politic of saying, I reject that. I’m going to choose my own path. And when I’m having a challenging time, I’m going to pay attention to where that comes from, because a lot of the places where I

have felt like I'm failing did not come from a radical self-love place. They have come from a culture that tells me to hate myself. And so, queer as politic.

Again, we hear another participant echoing how queerness allows for fluidity, freedom, choice within context. Participant 4 spent a large chunk of time discussing how her identity has changed over the years and how she uses her interpersonal power within her local queer community to push people's understandings about certain labels, identities, and word choices. For example, she talked about how if she is in a room with primarily lesbians, she might use the word queer to push back at sometimes binaristic and cis-sexist definitions of lesbian (or dyke). Other times, if she is in a room with queers, she might choose to use lesbian or dyke to challenge the idea that it has to be a binaristic sexual identity marker.

However, for her, queerness also allows for the freedom for her partners to identify in whatever way they would like; a "politic of difference.". While she does identify as a dyke and a lesbian (depending on the context), she mentions being concerned about what that can do for the trans and gender nonconforming folks that she has been involved with. For her, "I think that my queer identity was also a way for me to make sure to honor and the complexities of my sexuality around who I'm attracted to and also recognize the like dignity and sovereignty of people to name their own bodies." In this way, her politics of desiring to make space for the choices of her partners influences the words that she chooses to identify herself, as well as encompassing all of the non-normative ways that she experiences desire and relationality, such as through kink and polyamory.

For others, there was not as much political connection to the word queer, but it was more about how queer gives a potential label that reduces the complexity of a scenario:

I do see myself as queer. A lot of, from what I feel with queer, it's you know, queer is a label that you put on yourself when you don't really know what other labels you put on

yourself, you know? And it's like, sometimes it's easier to explain just queer than it is to sex well, I'm bisexual because like mine and not like mine, and I just say queer.

Participant 5, who was the most vocal about claiming bisexuality and what that means for her, mentions that she uses queer in the umbrella term sort of fashion to not have to explain her identity to others. In other words, she uses queer to indicate that she is not straight and that the rest of the details are too much hassle to explain most of the time. As with Participant 4, she often engages in nonmonogamous relationships and so explaining that complicates things unnecessarily in most contexts. Additionally, as with Participants 3 and 4, queer affords freedom for her partners' identities as well, and thereby not needing to explain how her partners experience gender and sexuality. Participant 6, who is genderqueer, also hinted at how using the term queer helps them to condense parts of them, but also leaves room for growth and difference:

I generally use the word queer and I use it because one, I feel like my sexuality is always political, whether I dislike that, it's not really a choice. It just is...I felt like it gave credence to my history as well as my present and the possibility for a change in the future, which I liked (Participant 6)

In this excerpt Participant 6 brings up the idea that being queer is always already constructed as political, whether or not they like that it is. What they're referring to here is that in this current socio-political historical moment, the influence of conservative Christianity and politics still renders queer outside of the norm, although that is evolving to include certain types of homonormativity. The reason that they like to use the term queer for themselves though is that it allows for the dynamic history that has been their relationships. In other words, claiming the word queer as opposed to lesbian or bisexual provided them with more room to acknowledge the various kinds of relationships that they have had, as well as the possibility for that to change at some point in the future. Participant 7 also related to a similar understanding of queer:

Yeah I think it also, like queerness in terms of politically is like an identity that can mean more than sexual orientation. So just like somebody who doesn't fall in like the straight,

cis-normative rule realm, but also in terms of just like, I see it in terms of like, the like, two-person relationship versus like many person relationship.

In this definition, Participant 7 also acknowledges the breadth that claiming a queer identity can encompass, including more of a commitment to radical politics, relationally falling outside of the “straight cis-normative rule realm,” and allowing for different relational configurations outside of monogamous dyads. Participant 8 also understood queer to be similar for her:

I do identify as queer. I define queer as, and usually when I’m talking I will say queer first and then go into saying that I’m bisexual. I define queer more as just being nonheterosexual and kind of fitting into that umbrella, how many people may define as being whether lesbian, gay, trans or bisexual or again, or whatever may be in the alphabet soup. So, I just, and also queering push against the norm. And I, in many ways, my body pushes against the norm (Participant 8)

Again, the idea that queer is outside of heterosexual contexts, as well as it being an overarching umbrella to place one’s identity is echoed within Participant 8’s definition as well. She also adds in the idea of her body being queer in that it “pushes against the norm,” in size, disability and race.

Because all of the participants did identify with queerness in some way, although the definitions may have been different, I revisited the question from earlier in the interviews about challenges within the queer community, from their perspectives as queer women. The issues brought up by participants demonstrated a range of concerns, from gatekeeping of transgender identity to sexual assault and predatory behavior. Participant 1 was the most vocal about trans concerns, and in particular the “gatekeeping of what counts as being transgender:”

Well, right now, I’m super angry about the gatekeeping of what counts as being transgender. I have a lot of friends who are transgender or genderfluid or bigender, agender, just any sort of gender non-normativity. And there’s a lot of talk from older folks who sort of do conform still to the gender binary of that being like a trend or being fake or done to be fashionable and being a detriment to the community, which really pisses me off because when has, you know, the straight universe ever needed an excuse to oppress us, right? Let’s not blame teenagers who are playing with their identity, like let’s blame who is actually

responsible. That's a big problem for me. There's a lot of gate keeping and then a lot of like, the idea that you have to be 100% morally pure, otherwise you're like a bad activist. You're a bad queer person.

In this excerpt, Participant 1 talks about her frustration with how “gender non-normativity” is not taken as valid in some aspects of the queer community. What she is referring to in this section is the idea that one has to express their trans identity in a particular way that fits with the binary to be accepted, particularly by queers who still seek assimilation into the binary and into the dominant ideological center. She also gets frustrated with the idea that if you unintentionally mess up in understanding someone's identity, that means “you're like a bad activist.” I followed up this comment by asking her if she thought queerness had to be inherently tied into activism.

Yeah, I think it does. I don't necessarily think it means need to tie into like protesting or boycotting, but I think it needs to tie into, you know, efforts to promote inclusion and awareness. And you know, even if that just comes in your day to day life of sharing experiences and trying to sort of talk people out of homophobia. But there does need to be some element of challenging hierarchies and oppression.

The notion of “challenging hierarchies and oppression” is something that was mentioned by several of the participants. For Participant 2, her most frequent commentary on queerness and the queer community was that it was too concerned with assimilation.

I think assimilationism is like the biggest challenge. And then kind of spurring from that, there are like, other smaller challenges. So, like, assimilation is kind of maybe the foundation. So, because of assimilation, like, we center very “acceptable” couplings of people, people who can be like, “Yeah, like that person's the man and that person's like the woman,” right? And can make it palatable for non-queer audiences. And I think because trying to highlight those specific people the most marginalized people are erased, and so then from the assimilationism we get erasure, and I think from erasure, we get like dehumanization of like, the most vulnerable populations within the community that then leads to like, excuses of overlooking like violence and death and trauma because we're so busy trying to fit in and be accepted.

In this passage Participant 2 articulates to the idea of how assimilation and visibility can be tied into the erasure and dehumanization of certain bodies. Particularly, what she is alluding to here

at the end of this section is the violence and high death rates against trans women of color, as well as folks with less class privilege, folks with disabilities, folks living with HIV. Instead of focusing on that within our community/ies, she argues, that we tend to focus more on how to “make it palatable for non-queer audiences.” This is why you see things like Dinah Shore, as mentioned earlier, being advertised the way it is, or why Pride features celebrity figures that are acceptable to the mainstream culture, like the new Fab Five from *Queer Eye*.

For Participant 3, this was a multi-layered answer, but drew on some of the same concepts as in Participant 2’s response. Again, as with Participant 1’s critique, they felt like there’s a lot of binaristic thinking that gets reified within the community/ies:

I think I feel more comfortable around LGBTQ people in the community who identify as nonbinary or like genderfluid, genderqueer, because I’ve just had so many crunchy situations where I’ve been with queer women and like, the reinstating of gender binary, the reinstating of all these things is just like, “Oh, but like I have this really problematic thinking,” and then I’m like, “You’re queer, so you should be doing more critical work.” But that’s fucked up to put on them, you know? But that’s my feeling, I guess.

I also think that there needs to be more conversation about like, within specifically like women in the queer community, like are you being a TERF? Like, are there trans women included in your definition of women? Are there nonbinary people that you’re accepting into your groups of friends? Like all those things are part of it, too.

As we talked, one of the hardest things for Participant 3 is the lack of critical thought or radical commitments of queer folks who claim to be engaging in critical work, particularly around binaries and bodies. They acknowledge that perhaps this is not fair to put on others, as not everyone shares the same commitment to politics of liberation, however moving beyond the binary and biological essentialism is crucial in order for the queer community to actually be queer, in their opinion.

Participant 4 also echoed some of the same ideas as Participant 3, stressing the political orientation of her queerness as how she orients to her community, but emphasizing her political focus on the experiences of women:

...like politically I just think for me, focusing on the experiences of women and like really, really, really focusing my energy and experiences on women and women's issues is where I put my heart and that there at times, folks will really have a problem with that. And I am always surprised by it. Like, that the pursuit of supporting women would be something not of value in our culture. Yeah. And it's amazing to me how people respond to that as if, as if I'm a big, nasty monster.

Throughout the interview, Participant 4 was clear that trans women are included in that "focusing on the experiences of women." However, as noted above, she gets a lot of critique from doing so. For her, one of the issues within queer community that is super prevalent is the exploitation of labor of femmes and the devaluation of women, in a continuation of toxic misogyny within the queer community.

Misogyny within the queer community was also something that Participant 5 found to be a big issue:

I mean, even among the queer community, it's mostly gay men focused. It's you know, if a gay man says like, I can't tell you how many times in college I got called an axe wound because of having a vagina. It's like, dude, just because I have a vagina does not mean that I'm any less valid than you... So usually gay men rule and I keep trying to tell them like, "Hey guys, hey. Hey, have you heard about this thing called the patriarchy? Have you heard about this thing that's like not only oppressing you because you're gay, but you're doubly oppressing me. Isn't that fantastic? Can you stop? That'd be great."

None of what Participant 5 is saying is novel; the misogyny of gay men is something that has long been an issue within the queer community. In addition, and perhaps an extension of misogyny and toxic masculinity was the discussion about predatory behavior and sexual assault brought up by Participants 6 and 7.

I think we need to talk about sexual assault. I think we need to talk about the emulation of masculinity as the ideal. And the femme phobia. Like, I feel like

there's a lot of like, it's great to want to sleep with femmes, what good are they really doing? ... like degradation of femme.

They mentioned how this is not limited to men; this "emulation of masculinity as the ideal" gets put forward in lesbian and queer women circles as well. The worship of masculinity, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, can lead to predatory behavior, as Participant 7 mentions, "I think there's still like, predatory behavior that bums me out a lot, and objectifying. And also, still subscribing to like, heteronormative versions of beauty."

While each of the participants did identify with the term queer, the same was not true for the word fat. Because not every person of size identifies with the word fat, and not every fat person uses it politically, as with the word queer, I asked participants if they had a) heard the word fat and b) what they thought about using it for themselves. All of the participants had heard the word fat and had the word fat used to refer to their body at some point during their lives. Usually the use of the word fat by others was not a positive one, but came out of a place of fear and ignorance. However, some of the interviewees have worked to reclaim the word for themselves and to give the word new power and meaning. Others had not quite shifted to using it politically yet, but did use it to refer to their body. The acceptability of queer and fat are not the same, and there will likely need to be a huge shift in how the word is understood, before others take to the use of it the same way as queer.

Participant 1 seemed to struggle the most with seeing the word fat in a more positive or neutral way. When asked how she would describe her body, she said that, "I just say I'm fat. Like, it's, I'm not delusional. So, it's not my favorite word to hear, but I am also still going to use it because otherwise it feels like I am trying to gently sugarcoat over any unpleasant aspect of my life." For her, using fat is more about the reality of her body than a particular claim to an identity. She went on to add, "I think it's very negative usually. Like, even if I'm using it for

myself, I don't like enjoy it. But it's just part of my experience, so I would rather be honest about it."

Each of the participants in some way acknowledged the negative connotation of the word, or the potential that the word has to enact harm, however several of them were working on trying to de-program that understanding. Participant 2 articulates her process:

I mean, I still like, I deal with, like, how it's been ingrained to be like a bad thing. But I've really worked the past several years to reclaim it and not, you know, kind of re-categorize it in my mind as like a descriptor and not a derogatory thing, but it still comes up for me sometimes, of course.

Even though she has done work over the last several years to reframe the word fat in her mind, it still carries the weight of the negative and moral judgements that often get coded within it.

Participant 3 articulated this struggle occurring "because the connotation of fat as a negative thing is so much stronger than the connotation of fat being neutral or positive and we've got a lot of work to do in terms of how we negotiate." Participant 7 also expressed a similar process in that "...for me, fat is very empowering and or, yeah, that's like how I choose to take it. But that took years of unlearning..."

They're not wrong; working through seeing the word fat as neutral or positive is no small task, and many times other people get offended even when hearing someone use the word to describe their body. When asked how she felt about the word fat, Participant 3 said,

I love it. I still actually love the fact that people get shocked when I use it. I love the fact that people want to apologize immediately, like when I say I'm fat, they want to go, "No, no, no no, no, that's too harsh." And it's like, it's shitty, at the same time and I love it. I love it because I love to make people have to think a little bit harder. And it's shitty because I should be able to tell you how I identify and you should be able to say, "Cool, that works for me."

Participant 3 was the most vocal about using the word fat, and one of the only participants who listed it as an identity early on in the interview. They've spent a lot of time in fat activist circles,

and have spent a lot of time talking about and unpacking the use of the word fat. They went on to add:

I mean, it's kind of a double-edged sword, but I really love using the word fat because it feels like the most real terminology that I can use to describe myself. It also elicits a really interesting response from folks who immediately want to backtrack and make apologies for it. And I'm like, you can't really make apologies for what I'm saying about myself, but okay, try. So, you know, the sometimes inclination is to be like, "Oh my God, you're not fat, no, no, no, no, no. You're just like, you're chubby. You're like, oh you're not fat. You're beautiful." And the apologizing for me using a term for defining myself is really interesting because it's like I'm defining myself. Why do you feel like you can tell me that I can't use that?

Again, in this passage, Participant 3 illuminates how others get concerned about their use of the word fat. As others, have expressed throughout the interviews discussed in this chapter, people worry that fat is the antithesis of beautiful or attractive, therefore the reaction of "You're not fat, you're beautiful," makes sense, annoying as it may be. Participant 5 made sure to clarify that in her response to the question:

I am fat. Fat does not mean I'm ugly. Fat does not mean pretty much anything about it. I have fat. I have a lot of it. I think I'm like 55% body fat. At least I think, I don't know... But I'm fat. There's not a goddamn thing wrong with being fat. You know, you can change it to, you can, you can change the moniker to whatever you want. You can be pleasantly plump. You can be chunky. You can be whatever you want. I like chunky but funky because it rhymes. But you know, it has so much less impact on me than it did when I was younger.

With each participant who claimed the word fat, they mentioned it having a significant impact on them when they were younger, and that being part of why they've done work now to reclaim it and make it into something that has far less of a negative connotation. Participant 4 linked queer and fat, and how reclaiming those words have been a source of power for her:

Fat, like the word dyke and queer, is a reclamation of language, and it is mine to use. I like it when someone, when I use it myself. I do not like it when I've been called a fat bitch more times than I can count. And that fat bitch is actually a fear, like, how do people describe you? Like, if they don't like my behavior, I'm a fat bitch. Like, and it is so fast and quick to the tongue for people that those two

words together are just the ultimate like, negative thing that someone could say to me...

And so, calling myself fat was like, an identity that I got, came to after queerness. Seeing fat queers love themselves like, continues to rock my world and rocked my world. Seeing fat women love themselves in a positive and affirming place changed everything for me. And so being... I believe on a good day, that I am the adult I needed and that I've become the adult I needed, and I continuously use the word fat as a way to make room for other people to like, have what the woman who came before me gave me. You know, like fat, it's a descriptor. It doesn't have to be negative, but I find power in it because, because it is a word that was hurled at me for so long and continues to be and it's mine. And I can take it and I can own it. And also, being fat in a world that tells us to be thin, in and of itself is queer.

Here is the connection of fatness and queerness in a political way, as is mentioned in the above excerpt, "being fat in a world that tells us to be thin, in and of itself is queer." Participant 3 also elaborated on this idea:

Fat is a queer issue, too. It's an issue. Not that I'm saying that fatness is bad. I'm saying that if queers are not also advocating for fat liberation, then how can you sit there and say that actually we are here for diversity, we actually are intersectional, we actually do care, we actually do want to fight for all? Because you're racist and you're fatphobic and you're ableist, and all of these things are truly showing.

Concluding Thoughts on Theme Three

Within this section, everyday identity performance was examined through the themes of queer failures and successes, relational constructions of queerness, and using the words queer and fat as a political marker. Specifically, this section sought to provide insight into how what is often considered presenting as "visibly queer" is complicated, and sometimes influenced by others' gender presentations as well. Additionally, whether one considers themselves queer or fat is a deeply personal and varied choice.

In regards to the first sub-theme, Queer Failures and Successes, participants noted that despite not feeling in line with their gender identity at times, many folks make choices about aesthetics and identity performance because of a desire to be seen. Some of this was based on

social pressure to belong as well as need or want for visibility, or being labelled as “queer.” Some of this comes from being constructed in particular ways, such as being “too much” or “not enough” in terms of queerness, body size, gender identity and so forth; most often, participants noted not being read by others how they wished to be read. Another one of the critical implications from this section was also the idea that disability affects identity performance, or that sometimes choices made in clothing and appearance come from sensory and mobility issues. Because of this, again, several participants mentioned not being able to fully express how they saw their ideal self.

This was also elaborated on within the second sub-theme in this section, which was Relational Understandings of Queerness. One of the important points from this theme was that the gender expression one’s partner also affects how one gets read as queer; relationships are used to prove one’s queerness. In other words, if someone is partnered with a person who presents in a way that is typically read as queer, such as more masculine aesthetic choices (clothing, short hair, no-minimal makeup), this constructs them as queer as well. Participant 8 commented how in her previous relationship with her husband, she was not often read as queer. However, with her current partner, who is “very butch,” she more often gets constructed as being queer. This was a major source of frustration for the participants who identified with bisexuality, such as Participant 8. Additionally, as many participants noted being attracted to femme/feminine folks, and being femme/feminine presenting themselves, this means that their partnerships are not always read as queer as if they adhered to a butch-femme binary.

Lastly, the word queer was easier to use than the word fat for almost all of the participants. Some of this, as was articulated in this section, is due to previous experience with how fat has been deployed towards their bodies in a way that queer maybe has not. This also

may be a generational construction, given that for the participants who were in their 20s, the word queer has been utilized culturally in a different way than it was for the participants who were in their 40s. However, the word fat was met with more resistance than the word queer was. While all of the participants did identify as queer, queer identity is deeply personal and varied. For some, it signifies an orientation towards a commitment to social justice and liberatory politics, whereas for others, it signifies an ability to be able to complicate (or simplify) their sexuality and attraction. Regardless of the reasons why, queer was an identity that each participant felt strongly attached to.

Conclusion to the Chapter

Within this chapter, notable moments from the interviews were selected to demonstrate the three themes that were assigned: intersections of fatphobia and queerness, whiteness and privilege, and everyday identity performance. While these reflections are certainly not exhaustive, they lend some perspective into quotidian queer fat experiences that have not previously been given focus. In the following chapter I provide a summary of the preceding chapters within the context of the broader research questions. Subsequently, I discuss the theoretical implications of this study as well as reflections on the methodology. Finally, I analyze the limitations of this study and provide avenues for expansion into future research.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, informed by theoretical understandings from queer theory, crip theory, and fat studies, I have analyzed interviews about everyday identity performance and bodies with self-identified Lesbian-Bisexual-Queer-Trans (LBQT) women who wear US clothing size 1x and up. By examining their narratives and experiences with self, others, media, and community, I have illustrated the ways in which fatphobia, queerness and privilege affect everyday identity performance. One of the most poignant ways that this has been illustrated is in the conversations and analysis of the idea of “not being enough.” Others’ perception of their identities, particularly in relation to their queerness, is a big influence in how participants either choose to perform their identities, or in the places and people they chose to connect with, in terms of community. Another large influence in everyday identity performance arises from notions of desire. In particular, participants mention making choices about their clothes, hair and language when considering how others would perceive or potentially be interested in them. Additionally, self-definitions of queerness and fatness, including whether they are identity categories or political choices (or both), impacted how participants see their daily interactions with self and others in how they carry out those identities. Overall, the primary goal of this study is to gain a better comprehension of LBQT women size 1x and up’s understanding of their bodies, everyday identity performance and negotiation of space and place. Through analyzing the transcripts of the interviews and considering my own reflections and experiences, I find that whiteness and internalized fatphobia contribute majorly to each of the participants’ understandings of the aforementioned aspects. However, simultaneously, the often-daily negotiation of privilege and discrimination in regards to various aspects of identity, specifically queerness and fatness, exists as a complicated crossroads.

Within this chapter, I provide a summary of previous chapters, consider the theoretical implications to the aforementioned theoretical influences, methodological reflections in terms of interviews and analysis, limitations, future avenues for research, and concluding thoughts. As with most research projects, the ending to this one is reached out of necessity to complete the dissertation more than a completion of thoughts around the topic. I hope to be able to build on this research in future, across a variety of spaces, and to continue to challenge my own assumptions around power, privilege, oppression, identity and performance.

In Chapter One, I introduce the topic of this study, including the rationale for this project and the research questions that guided this dissertation project. The main purpose of this study was to investigate how LBQT women articulate their understandings of body, self, and identity in this current social, political, and historical moment and how notions of whiteness, ability, queerness, and fatness are reinforced or challenged in their narratives. As stated in the introduction, there were three research questions that guided this study: (1) How do women size 1x and up everyday make sense of their LBQT identifications and their bodies in relationships to others and themselves? (2) How does intersectionality complicate LBQT women size 1x and up's understandings of their body and performing their identity/ies everyday? (3) How do size 1x and up women navigate physical and discursive spaces and places?

In Chapter Two, I situate my theoretical framework of queer and crip theory and fat studies, perspectives. This framework afforded me the opportunity to position my research within discussions around queerness, ability, fatness, and race, considering current contributions of literature as the realm to which my work is contributing. Within this research, I approach queerness from a variety of perspectives, including the political orientation of the concept, queer as referring to sexual and gender identity, and queer as in a departure from the normative. While

I do not hold that all of my participants orient towards a fat studies perspective, I use that theoretical founding as the way that I approach analysis of the data and conversations about body size in an attempt to decenter thinness as the primary avenue of discussion around bodies. Additionally, I utilize contributions from crip theory to consider the ways in which fatness can be seen both as queer and as disability. Crip theory also allows for me to further consider the intersections of ability around body size, particularly since it is something brought up by several participants.

In Chapter Three, I apply my theoretical lens(es) to answer my research questions and provide an overview of the methodology employed in this dissertation. I adopt a critical performative approach to in-depth interviews that were analyzed under the guidance of critical reflexivity. I conducted eight interviews with self-identified LBQT women who wear US clothing size 1x and up over the age of 18. All of the interviews were conducted at the Communication and Journalism building at UNM's Albuquerque campus, four of them were completed in person, and four over video chat due to distance. The interviewees represented various parts of the United States, including the Southwest, the South, the Northeast, the Midwest and the West Coast, across a variety of ages with ranges from 20s-40s. Three themes emerged from analyzing the interviews: (1) Intersections of fatphobia and queerness, (2) Critiques of whiteness and privilege, and (3) everyday identity performance.

In Chapter Four, I provide an analysis of the interviews with the participants. Three themes emerged from this analysis, and various parts of each theme addressed the three research questions that guided this study. Within these three themes, subthemes emerged around desire, relationality, failure, white femininity, and internalized fatphobia. In Theme One, Intersections of Fatphobia and Queerness, three subthemes arose: (1) Fatness and desire, (2) fatness and queer

community and (3) complicating fat embodiment. These subthemes address the main components of all three research questions: everyday identity performance in regards to body, intersectional complications and navigation of physical and discursive spaces.

Within constructions of fatness and desire, it is clear that sense of self as attractive is constructed in relationship to others and is a significantly intersectional concept. Certain overlapping aspects of their identities afford participants more or less space to express their desires or to feel that they are desired, due to mainstream depictions of attractiveness. Similar experiences in terms of sexuality and community were discussed as well as the impact fatness has on them. In terms of fatness and queer community, many participants do not feel completely part of queer community, and in particular mainstream queer community, because they do not see larger bodies held up as the ideal. Additionally, the pervasiveness of fatphobia within the queer community is cited by several as a reason they did not feel entirely a part of. Lastly, in complicating fat embodiment, a variety of topics are discussed, including issues with food, weight loss, medical contexts, travel, access of spaces, and navigating work environments, demonstrating ways in which spaces and places are engaged with for bodies of size.

In the second theme, Critiques of Whiteness and Privilege, this again, addresses all three of the research questions. Within this section the three subthemes were (1) the invisibility of white femininity, (2) degrees of fatness and privilege, and (3) internalized fatphobia. The purpose of this section is to look at the ways in which systems and privileges function within the interviews. While I had initially planned to do an intersectional analysis, due to the substantive lack of conversations about race with the participants, this means that I was not able to do a true intersectional analysis. However, it is my hope that I was able to complicate some of the intersection between fatness and queerness, and in particular the ways that it has been

constructed in past research. In looking at the invisibility of white femininity, it is apparent that the invisibility of white privilege, perhaps due to my own as well as the majority of the participants' privilege, is functioning within the responses. Because fatness is equated with excess, with lack of containment and control, it signals a departure from the white feminine ideal. This is hinted at, although not explicitly mentioned much by the participants. Concerning degrees of fatness and privilege, there is discussion about the range of fatness, and how not all fat experiences are the same. Folks on the smaller side of fat do not experience the world in the same way, in terms of access to place, space, and care, as someone who is towards the larger side of the quadrant of fatness. As the largest person involved in my study, I became hyperaware of both in the interviews and in the analysis of this theme/transcripts. Lastly, when considering the impact of internalized fatphobia, I look at how use of the word fat by self and others impacts participants, particularly in whether or not they choose to use the word for themselves. Additionally, I consider how participants discuss the impact of others' responses to the word fat and how their ideas about fatness influence how they see potential partners as more or less attractive. For some, fatphobia is explicitly named, but for others it is more inferred from their responses.

Finally, theme three, Everyday Identity Performances, also addresses all of the research questions, but primarily the ones concerning identity performance. The three subthemes in this section were: (1) Queer failures and successes, (2) relational understandings of queerness, and (3) queer and fat as political choice. Within this section I analyze the concept of how gender performance is often rendered a failure or a success based on certain choices that are made, in terms of who one partners or associates with, the aesthetics that one utilizes, and how one orients towards queerness (and fatness) politically or not. Specifically, in terms of queer failures and

successes, I discuss how participants struggle with negotiating their own preferred gender performance with expectations of masculinity or androgyny being predominantly preferred within queer women's circles. Because of this, many of the participants who identify more with femininity and feminine expression, felt that they do not get seen as "visibly queer," and that often leads to many of them feeling not "queer enough." With relational understandings of queerness, many participants brought up a struggle in feeling like they are only seen as queer when they are in relation to another person, who is "visibly queer," or that they have to be engaging sexually with someone who was not a cis man to be seen as queer. There is frustration over continued stress on more masculine appearance and performance here as well. Lastly, when framing the discussions around queer and fat as a political choice, I discuss how participants related to the terms "queer" and "fat," as they are loaded terms and often carry strong feelings or ideologies. While all of the participants do identify with queerness, though not all understood their queerness as a place of political engagement, several of the participants struggle to identify with the word fat. Some are very vocal about their use of fat, and use it as a way to "shock" people, while others acknowledge still struggling in working through unpacking how the word fat has impacted them throughout their lives.

Finally, in the remainder of this chapter, I connect the previously reviewed chapters to each other. I provide a discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications of this study, reflecting on how this study contributes to the literature, as well as how it makes critical contributions to the field of communication. Additionally, I discuss the limitations of this project, as well as other directions for future research. Finally, I offer concluding thoughts in response to this project.

Theoretical Implications

As proposed in Chapter One, this study was produced with the aim of providing theoretical implications around queerness, ability and fatness.. While often complicating notions of privilege and oppression were not outright named in the discussions with the participants, ideological assumptions about all of these aspects were apparent within their dialogues. One of the most pervasive concepts from the literature that permeated throughout every interview was the idea around “failure” or inability to perform a certain identity in a way that was considered legible or desirable to their target identity population. This came up in regards to gender performance, sexuality, body size, race, and ability. Participants articulated what they considered to be the legible or more desired instantiations of their specific identity/ies, and how they failed to measure up against this. For example, Participant 2 mentioned how because of her femme performance and her whiteness, she often gets read as straighter than she is, and she feels like an imposter or like she’s taking up space that someone might think she is not welcome in. She also articulated feeling conflicted about identifying as fat due to changes in her body over the past few years and how her size has shifted smaller. Each of the participants expressed feelings of not being “queer enough” in some form during the interviews. This notion of failure was the largest theme that arose through the data, and a concept that has been discussed prior in terms of both fat as failure and queer failure, but often the two have not been positioned together. I posit that despite the limitations of producing a true intersectional analysis within this document, this study still does offer ways to complicate intersections of queerness and fatness that have either been unexplored or less considered in the past.

Queer Theory. In this analysis, I extended some critiques offered by queer theory/ies including notions of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), theory in the flesh (Moraga &

Anzaldúa, 2015), homonationalism and whiteness (Puar, 2007) and queer futurity (Edelman, 2004; Muñoz, 2009). Additionally, notions of queer failure (Halberstam, 2011) were articulated and sometimes even explicitly brought up by participants (such as with Participant 7 who spoke about Halberstam by name when discussing queer failure). I think that this study, and in particular the section on queer failures and successes, speaks to the literature on queer failure and adds to it with considerations of how body size influences and forms notions of failure and/or success.

In terms of compulsory heterosexuality, one of the questions asked of participants was about how they came to understand their non-heterosexual orientation. For many of the women, it took them some significant time to come to see themselves as something other than heterosexual, especially considering that 7/8 of the participants identified with bisexuality in some way. For them, because they were also attracted to men, they didn't realize as quickly their attraction to women because it didn't "look" the way that they had been informed (through media, others' identity performances) that it was supposed to look. Part of that struggle to come to terms with what their identity meant for them is that others, and particularly others in the broader queer community have dismissed their experience as not being "queer enough." Additionally, with heteronormative logics of proof, the idea of coming out was not something that many participants articulated as an occurrence in their life, or not something that was a significant turning point. For many of the participants, due to gender expression and identity, they found themselves constantly having to assert their queerness and not being read as queer as much as they would like.

In terms of theory in the flesh and the body as a site/cite of knowledge, especially for queer folks of size, the fleshed-ness of their lives impacts how they are seen and in relation with

others. The tangibility of one's body is vital to how one understands their way in the world. For example, where the participants were geographically located, their race, their gender, their sexuality, their class status, their educational level, all of these were contributing factors in terms of how their size is interpreted and engaged with. For Participant 2, who was very vocal about her Southern identity, her size was not as vilified there as it was when she lived in the mountain region. She was referred to as "big" versus fat; the specificity of her geographical location was important in how her identity was understood. This also builds on Ahmed's (2005) ideas about bodies in orientation to each other.

In terms of homonationalism and whiteness, several participants classified mainstream LGBTQ culture as either white or assimilationist. There was this sentiment that the participants did not feel a part of mainstream culture, with some stressing this because of their size, others because of their class status, others because of their race, and others mentioned it being a combination of factors. For some this was a place of pride; they were happy to not fit in. But for others, this lack of inclusion and place was something that was disorienting and isolating. The concept of homonationalism via Puar refers to the notion that certain bodies are interpolated into the nation-state, as they further the white supremacist, nationalist, imperialist agenda. This is what participants who nodded towards the concept of assimilationist were hinting at; as fat queer women, they have failed to adhere to the prescriptions of the hegemonic dialogue. However, as 6/8 participants were white, there is an adherence to the national project in that way, and to not examine that is to assist that agenda.

In terms of queer futurity, fat bodies, similarly to queer (of color) bodies, are not rendered as worthy of future or even of having a future. The fat body is always already representing failure, excess and death, similarly to how queer bodies have also been constructed as failure,

excess and death. As White (2012) argues, the fat body is anti-social (similarly to how Edelman, 2004 conceptualizes anti-social), and not part of a “viable future.” Similarly, to how queer bodies deviate from “straight time,” fat bodies also deviate from “normative tempos” (McFarland, Slothouber, & Taylor, 2017). As mentioned in McFarland et al (2017), “...individuals are encouraged to lose weight for each ‘straight’ time ‘achievement,’ while the moral panic around ‘letting oneself go’ after these achievements is simultaneously deployed” (136). Several participants mentioned that they might be constructed as having let themselves go, because especially for fat women, the pressure to adhere to normative regulation around body is staggering.

Several scholars have argued for the idea of fat as being inherently queer, which one can argue by drawing on Halberstam’s (2005) definition of queer: “the normative logics and organizations for community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (6). By these logics, fat could be considered queer, as it represents a departure from normative environment. White (2014) builds on this, and cites Crawford’s (2017) pithy analysis that “normative gender is slender.” Because a construction of normative gender rests on thinness, White argues that perhaps fat folks, both cisgender and transgender, would “fail to successfully embody binary gender” (p. 96). In doing so, this would render fatness, especially in terms of gender expression, as queer.

Crip Theory. In addition to how this study contributes to the literature in queer theory/ies, it also lends contributions to crip theory as well. In particular, it builds on the concepts of compulsory able-bodiedness (Kafer, 2003; McRuer 2004, 2006) and disability as “failed performance” or a “flaw” (McRuer, 2004). As mentioned in chapter 2, compulsory able-bodiedness is the idea that everyone is assumed able-bodied until proven otherwise, similar to

how compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1990) functions by assuming heterosexuality to be the default. Pulling from this notion, one could consider how compulsory able-bodiedness and heterosexuality also function with ideas of compulsory thinness, or the idea that fat bodies are a deviation from the norm and smaller bodies are assumed. What I mean by this, is that structures, systems and expectations concerning how bodies take up space presumes that they are able to fit into certain seating, transportation, and so forth. Just as bodies are assumed to be able-bodied and straight, thinness is assumed and functions as a sort of “nonidentity” (McRuer, 2005). In other words, unless specifically called attention to, body size does not typically enter the conversation or become a point of analysis.

(Dis)ability was brought up by several of the participants as important parts of their identity as well as it coinciding with their fatness. Particularly for this project, participants talked a great deal about mental health and invisible disabilities, such as chronic pain and sensory issues. However, a way to expand this project and the literature would be a greater consideration of disability and fatness together, considering the similarities in accessibility that fat bodies and physically disabled bodies require, but considering the nuance of what those accessibility concerns looks like. In other words, while larger bodies and physically disabled bodies require accommodations in physical spaces, such as bigger or sturdier seats, larger bathroom stalls, or more room within a space, fatness and disability are not treated the same. The narratives around disability and fatness, for example, are vastly different. While with disability, affective responses such as pity might be elicited, there is not the same neoliberal narrative of responsibility and fault that is placed on the fat body. However, in both cases, asking for accommodations and lack of empathy are often similarly experienced.

The notion of a “failed performance” was a common point of discussion with several of the participants. Many framed their sized, gendered, and queer bodies as particular sites of failure, or of not performing in a way that was rendered “enough.” This also drew on notions of how identity is not considered valid unless there are specific easily visible markers (Kafer, 2003), which is something discussed within crip theory in terms of invisible disabilities. Similarly, to how disability studies and crip theory deal with notions of “proof,” several participants found themselves in that boat in terms of their queerness. Many of the participants felt that they did not perform “visibly” queer enough.

For some of them their fatness also rendered their disabilities something they either became hyper aware of or something that prevented them from being noticed. This was true, in both senses, for Participant 6, who shared about not getting diagnosed with depression until much later, partly because of their body size. However, they also noted that their body size sometimes feels uncomfortable, and they become hyper aware of other aspects of their mental health and invisible disabilities in that. Additionally, several participants saw their fatness as a flaw, or something that removed them further from the center of the mythic norm. Participant 1 even specifically referred to her body size as a detriment, and contributing to what she conceives as some of her flaws. Others acknowledged that fatness might be considered a flaw in terms of mainstream society, but for them, they chose to not see it that way or worked on not seeing it that way.

However, while this notion of not being enough or performing correctly tied in neatly for ability and queerness (via Crip theory), bodies of size are always already rendered hypervisible in spaces. This is where bringing in a fat studies perspective was necessary to continue the

discussion on visibility of identity, though I would love to see Crip theory continue to consider the ways that fatness might be aligned alongside of notions of (dis)ability.

Fat Studies. In addition to the contributions of queer and crip theories, employing the literature from fat studies allowed for more specific attention to the way(s) that fatness operates in specific avenues, even if the participants did not identify with fat. Fat studies has also been the lens through which I, as a researcher, have come to understand my own fat identity. Regardless of whether or not participants identified with the word, drawing from fat studies was crucial in its formation of this dissertation and my own thinking about it. Pausé (2014) argues that “scholarship within fat studies falls into one of two groups: research that examines the intersection of fatness and other identities, and research that examines the intersection of fat studies and other academic disciplines” (p. 81). I believe that in this dissertation I was able to attend to both of those groups by complicating how fat identity is embodied for queer women wearing 1x and up, as well as how fat studies can work alongside of other areas of scholarship, such as queer theory, crip theory, and communication studies.

Specifically, I was able to attend to notions of fatness as instability (LeBesco, 2014), excess (Bailey, 2010), and undesirability (Eguchi & Long, 2018). In regards to fatness as instability, many participants discussed the ways that their bodies have changed and continue to change over time, as well as how that flux affects their embodiment. In particular, this was where discussions about weight loss and the varying degrees of privilege with fatness came into play. Additionally, because body size is not necessarily a stable concept, this can present challenges with identification with fatness. Particularly for Participant 2, whose body has changed a lot over the last year, she struggled with whether or not calling herself fat was appropriate, since she was not experiencing all of the same occurrences that she used to when she was bigger.

In terms of fatness and excess, many participants discussed occurrences where they were constructed as “too much,” particularly in regards to food and others’ bodies. Specific examples on this included Participant 3’s narrative about judgmental engagements at the grocery store and Participant 7’s story about eating an entire pumpkin pie. Finally, in terms of fatness and (un)desirability, this was where participants had the greatest contributions. For many, not seeing their bodies, or bodies that resemble theirs, positioned as attractive or desirable, both within media and queer community, bore significant impact. This was also where discussions around lack of knowledge in terms of engaging sexually with larger bodies arose, specifically from participant 3 and 4.

Building off of the queer and crip theory discussions of failure, Murray (2005) states that “The fat body is discursively constructed as a failed body project,” which was something echoed by the participants. Some even explicitly called their body, or claimed that others might refer to their body as a failure; “my body is a punishable offense” (Participant 4). Many felt that because of their size, they were not considered as attractive, or that their size was something for which they were expected to apologize. Some of the participants were more reflexive about this in how the dominant ideologies the further fatphobia work to do this, and how they work to challenge that in their lives. Others were resigned to this notion of bodily “failure.”

One of the biggest contributions to fat studies literature within this project is how the interviews with participants provided nuance to often binaristic ideologies within the fat communities. For example, in the discussion about not using IWL in fat communities, it was clear that several participants needed and wanted to talk about weight loss and what that means for them, especially in light of disordered eating, mental health and disability. Weight talk does not have to be a blanket evil topic, nor does it have to be done in a way that is triggering for folks

with disordered eating histories. However, this is often not a topic that is considered appropriate within fat communities, and those who engage in intentional efforts to reduce their size are often met with antagonism. I would like to see more scholars consider ways to nuance these conversations and leave space for the liminal, as opposed to the binary of celebrating IWL and shunning IWL.

Another important contribution of this project to the fat studies realm is the discussion on desire, and particularly queer desire. Being that there is not a large range of literature covering queer fat desire, the contributions from this study narrow the gap in the body of work. Discussions of fat desire, and in particular in-depth discussions that can arise from interviews, complicate the ways that fat bodies often get framed as lacking in sexual interest or in being fetishized. Allowing for participants to name how they experienced desire provided more nuance in those conversations. Additionally, there is very few conversations about desire and queer women, and in particular women who are attracted to women. This study was able to shine a light on a particular section of the queer community that is not often given space.

Communication Studies. White body size has not always been a consideration within communication studies, and in particular the impact that body size has on our communication, I would assert that it is inherently a communication topic. As I argued in the beginning of this document, our bodies are how we communicate; how we talk, how we see others, how others see us, impact what kinds of communication and relationships we can have. Stereotypes of fatness influence who and what fat bodies are given access to, in terms of relationship and communication. We are not engaging with others outside of our fleshed experience(s); body size is nonverbal communication.

Beyond this, in terms of intercultural communication and conversations about identity, this dissertation suggests and argues for the including of body size in consideration of how people understand the many layers of their identity vectors. In particular, because scholars have called for more intersectional considerations of identity, an expansion to include body size is a way to make that conversation deeper and richer. Intersectionality attends to notions of instability and fluidity, as queer theory does, and this allows for discussions around fatness to extend beyond it being a stable conception of identity to being something in flux, and something that changes meaning depending on how fat someone might be. As was discussed in chapter 4, one of the participants mentioned her body significantly changing over the course of the last year, and how that created a struggle in sense of identity for her. It impacted how she conceived of who she was, where she belonged, and how she could relate to others. Because fatness had become such a fixed part of how she saw herself, as several fat activists such as Wann (1998) purport fat as an unchangeable characteristic, the idea of instability was something that threw her.

Fatness has been linked to communication in terms of the conception of “fat talk” or IWL talk. Many participants expressed discomfort with the rigid idea of no IWL talk in many areas of the fat community, due to the ways that it polices or places expectations on how bodies are supposed to maintain their shape, ignoring other intersectional aspects of one’s identity that might contribute to desire for weight reduction. White (2014) argues that for fat and trans folks, the negotiation of those identities is much more complicated than simply pro or anti weight loss. They argue for a broader intersectional consideration, particularly along the lines of transness and fatness, to consider how there can be a “joyous celebration of bodily malleability,” which “is not something echoed in the majority of fat acceptance discourses. Rather, these have been

constructed precisely around resisting the overwhelming cultural imperative for fat people to change their bodies” (p. 92). This is a point of contention for White, who discusses the desire as a trans person to engage in bodily modification to feel “at home,” while struggling as a fat person with the idea that one needs to be “at home” in their body as it is. Again, this represents a need to be more intersectional in considerations of fatness as well as the ways that fat-positive rhetoric is deployed.

Additionally, in their study on intersections of fat and trans identity, White (2014) calls for more consideration of the ways that fatness and transness may bear similarities, due to the ways that both represent non-normative embodiment. In particular, White points out the issues that exist within many avenues of fat acceptance and fat literature: default cisgender femininity. In particular, White mentions that “successful’ fat acceptance is premised on the ability of fat women to take back and inhabit a femininity that is positioned as ‘rightfully’ theirs” (p. 89), which ignores the experiences of anyone who falls outside of that conception. They argue that a greater consideration of intersectionality would afford for nuance in conversations about fat acceptance, especially given the prevalence of such narratives based in feminine “reclaiming.”

Earlier in this document I reference Yep’s (2008) study on the overwhelming heteronormativity in communication studies. In this piece, he calls for queer scholars to challenge the overwhelmingly heteronormative (and white) perspective that influences so much of our literature, conferences, and academic conversations. I would build upon this call, by asking for a greater consideration in how thinness also pervades much of our scholarship, conferences, and academic conversations. A consideration of body size could provide a rich avenue for renewed conversation within our discipline, as well as providing a rich launching off point for a myriad of different research topics and studies.

For example, scholars within interpersonal communication could consider the impact that body size has in dyadic relationships, whether romantic, plutonic, workplace, and so on. Organizational communication could consider the ways that fat bias is communicated openly (or less openly) within workspaces, and how a lack of weight discrimination policies affects the everyday communication of fat employees. Health communication could specifically look at doctor-patient communication around weight and body size. Intercultural communication could consider the way(s) that adding body size into conversations of identity and culture would provide for even more nuance. I could increase this list ad infinitum as to the way(s) that body size is inherently a communicative concept. And while this study was not perfect in its attempts to intersectionally complicate identity, I believe that it provides a solid case for making “corporeal interventions” (Valles-Morales & LeMaster, 2015, p. 79) and for rendering it an important avenue of discussion for communication.

Methodological Reflections

Challenges in interviews. Due to the amount of questions, 39, the interviews were all fairly lengthy. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, they were an average of 73 minutes, and ranged from 51:55 – 1:50:48. I had anticipated the interviews lasting from 45-60 minutes, but most of them were around 60 minutes or slightly over. I did check in with participants as we chatted to make sure they were okay with the time commitment, and reiterated that we could stop at any time if they needed to leave or end the interview. Particularly, with one of the participants, the interview lasted almost two hours. She had warned me in advance to the interview that she had a lot of things to talk about, especially since she does not get the opportunity to talk about these issues with a sympathetic audience a lot of the time.

Because of the time constraints, I had difficulty finding opportunities to ask more spontaneous questions than I had originally hoped. Part of this was due to the project being my first experience with qualitative interviewing, and I did not anticipate how I might experience a learning curve, in terms of getting comfortable with establishing rapport and trusting in the flow of the interview. By the time I got to the eighth interview I felt much more confident in conducting them, as well as in being able to not have to so strictly adhere to my interview guide or take notes during the conversation.

Additionally, in the construction of the interview questions, I may have replicated reductionist notions about understanding of identity and intersectionality. Driving factors in this may have been a combination of my whiteness as well as my inexperience in designing research questions. As the interviews continued on, I noticed that a lot of participants talked about their responses more intersectionally, or struggled to separate out just their queerness, or just their fatness. So, where I may have lacked in my question design, at times, the participants helped to broaden what was covered. Going forward with future work, having had this experience and knowing a little better how an interview conversation might go, I would be a little less rigid in my question design and have less structure and instead ask participants to share specific narratives about times when they'd experienced something, such as medical fatphobia.

Additionally, I can also work towards being more aware of how my whiteness and privilege might function in the way I word questions and the questions that I leave out, as well as not pushing participants as far as I could have. Specifically, I could have pushed several of the white participants harder in terms of conversations about race, but the combination of my own whiteness and inexperience with interviewing resulted in less depth than could potentially have occurred.

Challenges with analysis. While I had great data from my participants, the analysis was not without challenges. One of the challenges in writing up the analysis portion of this document was in holding my participants accountable for the ways in which they may reify problematic discourses. However, because I wanted to look at everyday identity performance in a complicated way, this meant needing to be mindful about the ways that the participants (and myself) can reify privileged positions and ideologies within our discourses. Because many of the participants have experienced discrimination or are in less privileged positions, I struggled to move beyond a perspective on fat experience that rested on fat as marginalized. Part of this may have been my own perspective entering the interview space as well as many, if not all of the participants being smaller fat bodies than myself; that was a place of struggle and dissonance for me as I was writing this document. Comparatively to some of my participants, I experience greater difficulty in my daily navigation of the world in a fat body; the amount of space that my body takes up is greater in general, rendering some places less accessible than others. As Levan (2014) mentions, “One size does not fit all and the invisible needs to be made visible. I am fat. I exist. I take up the amount of space I need, no more and no less” (p. 127). All fat experience cannot be essentialized, and all fat bodies do not take up space in the same ways; this leads to differing experiences in relation to space.

However, my bigger body size is not the only factor in my daily navigation of space, place and relationality; I am also white, highly educated, and a US citizen. Additionally, I am not always read as queer, and can pass as straight if I desire. Most of my disabilities are invisible. While it can be frustrating for those parts of my identity to not be seen as readily, it also means that I am travelling through space with added normative protections and privilege. My fatness does not negate my whiteness, educational privilege and nationality. This was something that I

also could have challenged my participants further on, particularly in the discussions of “visible” queerness and not being “enough” in one particular way or another. Especially for my participants who identified as bisexual, this was a sore spot; many of them already struggle in feeling like they are taken seriously as queers, and so the idea that there might be some privilege in passing for straight was not something that they wanted to entertain. Additionally, there were many ways in which I could have challenged the participants’ own understandings of issues, especially whiteness and white femininity, but that were lacking. For example, when participants discussed their intersecting identities, for those that left out the race as a significant factor in those intersections, I could have followed up by asking them how they understood their race.

In addition to the challenges with the analysis and interviews, there were limitations of this study. In the next section I consider how those limitations played out within this study, as well as thinking through future directions that this research could take, based off of some of the limitations as well as through knowledge gained within this particular study.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any study, there were many ways in which this research could be expanded and nuanced further. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to conduct this research and to share space with my participants, and through that, I also reflected on ways that this work could grow in the future. In terms of the participant population, this study was limited to self-identified LBQT women who wore US clothing size 1x and up. For future studies, I would like to narrow that research criteria to self-identified LBQT women who wear US clothing size 3x and up, or even 5x and up, further focusing on folks who exist in even larger bodies, considering the dearth of research there. The rationale for this change of distinction is also related to the dividing of bodies via clothing sizes, as mentioned earlier with the quadrant of fatness. 1x is considered plus

size, but you can still reasonably find clothes in your size in most stores, and certainly in plus-size affiliated stores like Lane Bryant, Torrid, Maurice's. 3x is the largest size that many clothing companies, in person and online, carry within their stock. Even at 3x, it is almost impossible to find clothes in person, and sometimes just as hard to find them online. In 5x, there are extremely limited options, and much of the time they require either custom construction and/or are extremely expensive. As someone who wears between 4x/5x depending on the brand, I know that I have about two websites and two in person stores (Lane Bryant & Torrid) that I can occasionally find something, but if I do I either have to compromise along the lines of cost or aesthetic.

Due to cost, this is also a class issue, and considering the ways that fatphobia functions within the workplace and job opportunities, with fat folks receiving fewer job opportunities and lower pay, it is a significant factor in everyday understandings of how fat bodies navigate the world. Clothing size and access to clothing is much more than a superficial issue, but rather carries deeper connotations and significance about whose bodies are seen as valuable (along the lines of being capitalist consumers and producers), whose bodies are worthy of being seen aesthetically (the choices get smaller the larger the sizes get) and whose bodies are even considered as worthy of existence (lack of sizes constructed means those sizes are not considered worthy of access to clothing).

Besides clothing, with the increase in size the obstacles to navigating the world increase: seating, access to public transportation, medical discrimination, lack of available romantic partners, and so forth. I think it could be interesting even to compare experiences of folks in the smaller realm of the galaxy of fatness with the experiences of folks who live in larger bodies in that frame, especially considering how size privilege within the fat community/ies is rarely

acknowledged; only one of my participants mentioned being a smaller fat, when I would actually consider several of them to be towards a smaller perspective; I was the fattest person involved in my dissertation.

Additionally, I would also like to specifically ask in future for participants who self-identify as fat. While several of my participants do, not all of them did, nor do all of them identify with it in the political sense of the word, such as they do with queer. Self-identity with the word, particularly in a way that is not based on a self-derogatory understanding, creates a particular orientation to the world and bodies that I would be interested in delving more into. For example, as someone who does identify with fat as with queer from a political orientation, I know there is a distinct difference in say, how Participant 1 and I understand the word fat as it is interpolated in regards to our bodies. For her, fat was something that she holds in more of a negative light; fat is something that makes her body less attractive, fat is something that others have used to speak down about her body, and fat is something that takes her farther away from her ideal self. For me, I do not cringe at using the word fat; it is a part of how I see myself, nor are the ideas of being fat and attractive mutually exclusive.

However, I do also want to offer a clarification about this notion of not seeing fat as negative. I do not pretend to always, perfectly, one hundred percent of the time see my fat body as something that is okay, that is not wrong, that is worthy of care. Due to the way(s) that internalized fatphobia and diet culture can pervasively permeate one's psyche, there are often times where I struggle with seeing my body as something besides a problem. It is in those moments where I then try to reach out to fat community, or I consume images or content from fat creators, reminding myself that I am not alone in this struggle. So often dehumanization

processes function because they make us feel alone and isolated; if we are in community it is easier for us to bounce back from those perspectives.

I would also like to include more perspectives of women of color, trans and genderqueer folks, and a broader range of ages. While I did have two participants who identified with being genderqueer in some way, I only had one participant who explicitly identified as a Black woman and one biracial participant. This reified the whiteness that I was hoping to not reify in this study, perhaps due to my own whiteness, that exists in much of the conversations about fatness in the fat communities/online. However, while that was limiting, I was then also able to look at how white femininity plays into understandings of identity performance, bodily presentations, desire, privilege and discrimination in ways that have not been discussed in great detail prior.

Additionally, all but one of my participants (Participant 4) identified with bisexuality in some way. I would also be interested in looking specifically at how women loving women (WLW) of size understand identity and attraction when the possibility of men is not an option. In other words, how do fat women experience the world of attraction and desire differently when there is zero desire to attract men? Is there a difference? For example, specifically how do fat lesbians or fat dykes orient towards desire and body? That was something I had hoped to explore in this study, and was able to postulate some thoughts, but I would have liked to go more into detail there, partly because of my own orientation to the world as well as to address the gap in the literature with queer fat women. As mentioned earlier a lot of written/published academic conversations about desire center around desire between men and women, and while not inherently always heterosexual, do exist in the land of heterosexual privilege and heteronormativity.

Moreover, I did not specifically ask for participants to name their ages, but most of them either brought it up or referred to it in other ways, such as referring to generational markers where they fall into. Five of my participants were in their 20s, one in her 30s, and two in their 40s. It would be interesting for future work to consider how different generational divides frame notions of identity, particularly with how concepts of queerness especially shift so drastically over time. For example, Participant 4, who is in her 40s, mentions that she has been in queer communities for a long time, and the history of the community affects how she sees her identity: “When babies are like, “I’m 26 and you’re not a dyke,” And I’m like, I’ve been a dyke since like, like, for 20 years. No, you don’t get to say it. Especially because the history of the word dyke. It comes from a place of power.” Because of her history, growing up as a queer dyke in the bay area, experiencing violence related to homophobia, navigating herself and her community for as long as the “babies” have been alive, she notices some distinction in choosing certain identity labels and experiencing resistance. Particularly, she commented about the resistance to use dyke or lesbian within younger queer communities, as there are some who do not feel the term fits them anymore, or who see it as an outdated identity. This is why she referred to the importance of knowing your queer history and understanding where these terms and places of resistance come from. Age becomes a factor there as well as in attraction, which I discuss in a previous chapter.

Another one of the ways I would also expand this research in the future, especially considering topics brought up by participants in this study, is more focus on fat community and allyship. While the focus of this dissertation was more along the lines of queerness intersecting with body size and other identity components, I would like to see more research that delves further into fatness and how fat community can impact senses of self, inclusion, belonging and

safety. I feel that is a limitation of my questions; I focused on asking about queer community, but not about fat community. I think that a consideration of fat community, as well as how people conceptualize what that means and looks like in the everyday, would be really fascinating and a way to broaden this research as well as to more specifically lend towards scholarly framing of fatness as culture and community.

Furthermore, I would like to delve more into notions of fat allyship in a couple of ways. First, how thin(ner) folks can be allies to fat bodies, and second, how fat bodies can be allies to others with more minoritized identities along the lines of race, gender and ability especially. In regards to the first point, I would love to consider asking participants, especially those self-identifying with “fat,” how they would ask thin(ner) folks to demonstrate allyship. From my perspective as a fat body, I would ask thin(ner) folks to put their bodies on the line alongside of mine, and to ask that they speak up for size inclusion, because when they do, they are more easily heard by others with thin(ner) privilege than if I speak. Similarly, white, cisgender and more able-bodied fat folks can work to be allies to folks of color, trans and genderqueer/non-conforming folks, and disabled people. For example, if my thinner colleagues speak up about the lack of accessible seating options at conferences, or ask for a table as opposed to a booth when out to eat, this not only takes the labor off of the fat bodies, but also likens the possibility that those in positions of power might listen. In regards to the second point, I would encourage more fat folks to remember that the struggle for fat liberation is inherently tied to all other struggles for liberation such as racial, colonial, disabled, queer, prison, and class liberation. We do not exist in a vacuum, and all oppression is connected.

Lastly, another avenue that could be considered for future research avenues would be the creation of a full-length solo performance with my voice in concert with those of my

participants. Given my background in performance studies, this is something I have considered would be a way to take this research beyond the page and reach more folks, potentially those who fall into the participant demographic as well as those who could benefit from learning about how fatphobia functions particularly along lines of queerness. This would also be a way to engage with more embodied sense-making beyond the written form and to provide perspective for audience in a way they might not otherwise understand without witnessing a larger body purposefully taking up space. As several scholars have noted (Jones, 2014; LeBesco, 2014; Luckett, 2017), fat bodies are always performing about fatness regardless of whether or not they are calling attention to it. I would like to call attention to it and give the audience permission to focus on my body, instead of feeling like they either can't focus on it or only focus on it without acknowledgement to what it means.

While I have addressed many different future projects and areas for improvement, I do not wish to negate the efforts of this project. Working with these participants and these questions at this particular moment (societally, historically, politically and personally) allowed for specific types of conversations to take place. I am in awe of the willingness and presence of the participants through this project; I am so grateful for their participation in this project and for having the opportunity to share space with them. One of the surprising parts of this dissertation that I feel I would be remiss to not discuss before the completion of this document would be how this process of interviewing other queer women of size impacted me. I mention some of this earlier in the analysis chapter as I engage in some critical reflexivity, but I wish to also explicitly state some things here.

First, in getting to spend many hours (9:48:45, to be exact) with other women of size, I found some community that I did not know I was hurting for. There is a particular ephemeral

experience of being around other fat folks, especially fat queers, that is affirming and encouraging. As several participants mentioned, they feel like they can't always be all the aspects of themselves all at once especially in the queer community. While I don't know if we can ever fully be ourselves in any space, I know that I was closer to being able to be more of myself with my participants. My fatness is something that I often feel falls to the wayside or is something not considered "worthy" of community, and so it was lovely to not have to sideline that and be able to fully engage as a fat queer.

On the other hand, because so many of the stories told to me in these interviews were experiences similar to mine, or places where I could echo their stories with my own, there was aspects of this experience that were incredibly lonely and isolating. These conversations highlighted just how systemic all of these issues are; in theory, I know this, and in my own body I know this, but there was something about hearing it eight times over that landed in a particular affective way. Specifically, hearing about others' loneliness, others' rejection, isolation, lack of care from medical professionals, exclusion from their so-called communities; all of this provoked my own memories and stories and emotions about these experiences that I did not expect to be so intense. Conversations lingered in my brain, my muscles were tense, my anxiety and depression were heightened; this document and this study demanded significant labor and bandwidth from me and my body.

Again, while I do discuss this earlier, I wanted to bring it up in this section as well because I was not prepared for the amount of emotional and psychological labor that these interviews would elicit. For future work, having the experience of this project, I would know better how to prepare myself for the different kinds of labor that this research might prompt, as well as trauma that might arise from engaging in certain conversations. Again, I knew in theory

about how this would affect me, as plenty of scholars have written about it, but until I experienced it in my body, I was not aware of what my body and myself would need throughout this process. That is another way in which I would know how to proceed better with future work, or at least better aware of what resources (mentally, physically, psychologically, chronemically, monetarily) are required of me to do this type of work. As a person who struggles with mental illness, in addition to other disabilities, doing work that continuously exposes the inequality of our various cultural systems and the seeming impossibility of change was something that significantly triggered my depression and anxiety, and in ways that were, at times, scary and dangerous. I sacrificed a great deal of myself in the writing and reflection of this document, and I am grateful for the support systems that afforded me space and care to survive this process.

Conclusion

Queer women of size are a unique group due to the ways that they simultaneously hold privilege and discrimination. In general, within Communication Studies, there is not a significant area of research in regards to body size. As argued earlier in this document, body size is a communicative phenomenon due to a multitude of reasons, but in particular, since we communicate in bodies and body size carries certain stereotypical assumptions that are brought with us into communicative encounters, we need to consider the significance of body size in our scholarly conversations as a discipline. Because body size is a communicative phenomenon and important to considerations of identity, which is a well-established area of communication research, more scholars need to take up the consideration of body size.

Specifically, I issue a call to scholars who experience thin(ner) privilege to consider speaking and writing about the impact of body size in their classrooms, their research, and in their conference presentations; there is a strong need for intersectional allyship across the

discipline in terms of body size. Similarly to how white scholars need to work along lines of anti-racism in their personal and professional lives, US scholars need to work to dismantle US-centric logics in their work, and able-bodied and neurotypical scholars need to expand their considerations of ability and neurodiversity, thin(ner) scholars should consider how their thin privilege affects their abilities to navigate relationships and everyday experiences. Also, similarly to how others with privilege can perform allyship in their interactions with others who carry privilege, such as white folks educating other white folks on racism and white supremacy, thin(ner) folks can educate other thin(ner) folks on how fatphobia, both internalized and externalized, functions to exclude certain bodies from large swaths of societal engagement. When folks with thin privilege begin to advocate for folks who do not experience thin privilege, this opens up spaces for larger bodies to be included and valued, and takes the labor of education off of the bodies of size.

The final question I asked of my participants in the interview was for them to relay any advice that they had for other LBQT women. Within those answers, there was a sort of overarching theme that the labor to educate about body size should not be on the bodies of size, but that we have access to tons of educators online who can provide such information. For example, Participant 3, who considers themselves very involved in online fat (positive) communities/Instagram influencers, had a lot to say on the subject, and in nuanced and well-thought out ways. They mentioned

Well first of all, like, read some good books like, by Sonya Renee Taylor's book, "The Body is Not an Apology," and do some fucking labor in terms of radical self-love and what that looks like. And also like, stop forcing people to do the labor for you and actually do the work. Like, if you're thin and you're white and you're like, "Ah, I don't know how to understand how I'm complicit in fatphobia," Google. Google, support fat people who are creators, you can literally find so much fat work if you just go on Instagram and type in the hashtag fat liberation. Like now more than ever, gaining knowledge is easier. I know that

there is still a large population of folks who don't have access to Wi-Fi or the internet, but the groups of people that I think I'm specifically talking to are the most privileged groups who probably have access to education for free by internet means, you know?

So, like, do that work. Like, check your own implicit fatphobia and call out people who have fatphobia. You should not be having friends who police what other people eat/ You should not be going to dinner with folks who are like, "I can't have the bread because like, I'm just way over my calories already." Like, you shouldn't be encouraging or entertaining this because at the end of the day, it also affects you. Fat is a queer issue, too. It's an issue. Not that I'm saying that fatness is bad. I'm saying that if queers are also not advocating for fat liberation, then how can you sit there and say that we actually are here for diversity, we actually are intersectional, we actually do care, we actually do want to fight for all?

As Participant 3 points out, there are plenty of resources available that do not rely on the labor of fat folks in terms of educating thin(ner) folks about how they are "complicit in fatphobia."

Looking at one's privilege, seeking out one's own information, considering the ways that one might be complicit in privilege and oppression are ways that you can grow and work towards being more inclusive and intersectional in your understanding; diversity should include body diversity as well.

Again, my primary goal of this study was to understand how LBQT women of size's everyday identity performances affect their understanding of their bodies and their selves. Through an analysis of literature, application of theory, and further analysis of the transcripts of my interviews with the participants, I was able to highlight how intersections of fatness and queerness affect the ways one experiences one's body in the world, as well as in relation to others. I also looked at how privilege and oppression function simultaneously to create situations where queer folks of size are often (literally) not fitting in.

While I recognize that the author's intention is not always the effect that participants receive in their reading of a text, it is my hope that readers are able to see fat bodies in more human ways. So much of the popular discourse about larger bodies comes from a place of pity,

disgust, and dissociation. Fat bodies, as with other bodies that deviate from the mythic center, are not deemed worthy of complicated lives and feelings. It was my goal to try to demonstrate, through the retelling of the participants' stories in concert with my own, the rich, nuanced, and complicated lives that occur for people of size. In addition, I hoped to highlight how queerness and fatness intersect in very unique ways, that often differ from the experiences of fat heterosexual folks and thin(ner) queer folks. In doing so, I aimed to shed light on a section of the population that has not previously been given a lot of focus within academic scholarship.

While I know that I did not do this perfectly in any sense, it is my hope that the participants in this study, including myself, provided avenues for readers to question their own understandings of bodies, how fatphobia plays out in their lives, and the ways that structures are not designed with larger bodies in mind. I hope to encourage readers consider the ways that thinness functions as an unspoken expectation, how a thin ideal affects their understandings of who they might seek out relationships with, as well as how the thin ideal impacts their own understanding of their body/ies. I am grateful for the opportunity to engage with participants and hold discussions around concerns that I have had for years; in addition to furthering the body of research, I also was able to foster relationships with my participants and engage in community in ways I so often do not get to experience.

A performative ending:

Tears run down my face as I transcribe. Each narrative that echoes mine strikes at my heart. I am in pain and in joy simultaneously. I feel alone. I feel seen. I feel devastated at how structural these experiences are. My muscles are tense and I'm getting headaches; I feel this work in my body. Selfishly, knowing that I'm not the only fat queer struggling with this helps,

but also knowing I'm not the only fat queer struggling with this just heightens how broadly fatphobia permeates so many different areas. That hurts.

I breathe. I cry. I text a friend. They send encouraging words. I cry some more. I return to this document, typing out sections of narrative from the interviews. I smile, remembering how it felt, even if for just an hour, to feel camaraderie with queer women of size. I think of the laughter, taking up space together, the comfort in my body, the shared jokes and stories. I did not expect my dissertation to involve so much emotional labor, but I suppose that was naive. As I close out writing each of the sections, I think back to the stereotypes that permeated my mind through this project, and challenge them with other words that were shared by the participants, and that I can find true about myself as well.

...passionate / flexible / driven / fleshy / comfy / cute / kind / funny / pretty fucking cool / survivor / pleasure-seeker / messy / free / safe / self-compassionate / unapologetic / open / self-loved ...

And so, I bring to a close this document, in gratitude, as it was opened.

Appendix A IRB Approval



DATE: July 19, 2019

IRB #: 09619

IRBNet ID & TITLE: [1440737-2] Complicating Bodies: Queerness and Body Size in Women's Sexual Orientation and Identity

PI OF RECORD: Shinsuke Eguchi, PhD

SUBMISSION TYPE: Response/Follow-Up

BOARD DECISION: APPROVED

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 18, 2019

EXPIRATION DATE: N/A

RISK LEVEL: MINIMAL RISK

PROJECT STATUS: ACTIVE - OPEN TO ENROLLMENT

DOCUMENTS:

- Advertisement - Verbal Recruitment (UPDATED: 07/5/2019)
- Consent Form - Consent Form Email (UPDATED: 07/5/2019)
- Consent Form - Consent Form (UPDATED: 07/5/2019)
- Letter - Response to OIRB (UPDATED: 07/5/2019)
- Protocol - Protocol (UPDATED: 07/5/2019)

Thank you for your Response/Follow-Up submission. The UNM IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized. **This project is not covered by UNM's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.**

The IRB has determined the following:

- Informed consent must be obtained and documentation has been waived for this project. To obtain consent, use only approved consent document(s).

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category. **If federal funding will be sought for this project, an amendment must be submitted so that the project can be reviewed under relevant federal regulations.**

All reportable events must be promptly reported to the UNM IRB, including: UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to participants or others, SERIOUS or UNEXPECTED adverse events, NONCOMPLIANCE issues, and participant COMPLAINTS.

If an expiration date is noted above, a continuing review or closure submission is due no later than 30 days before the expiration date. **It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply for continuing review or closure and receive approval for the duration of this project.** If the IRB approval for this project expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this project. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

Please note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the closure of this project.

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail at MSC02 1665, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; phone at 505.277.2644; email at irbmaincampus@unm.edu; or in-person at 1805 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at irb.unm.edu.

Appendix B Invitation Email Letter

Subject Line: Opportunity to Participate in Research

Dear x,

My name is Hannah Long and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication and Journalism at University of New Mexico. My research and teaching interests revolve around intercultural communication, gender and GLBTQ (Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender-Queer) studies, and fat studies. I am currently interested in learning how Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer and Transgender (LBQT) women negotiate their relationships with body size. To conduct this study, I would like to interview you to learn your perspectives on the topic.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you identify as an LBQT woman over 18 years of age and wear 1x sized (US) clothes and up. The interview includes questions that ask about how you understand your LBQT identity, your relationship to your body, representation and perceptions of bodies. You are expected to interview with me for between 45 – 60 minutes in the Communication & Journalism building at the University of New Mexico or via Skype. That interview time is your only involvement in this study. I will audiotape our interview for the purpose of analysis. After I collect your stories, I will analyze your stories along with others. The maximum number of participants involved will be twenty (20).

Your involvement in the research is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. There are no names or identifying information associated with your responses. Your interview will be assigned a study code number. While your legal name and contact information may be obtained in order to reach you for the interview, that information will be destroyed following the completion of the dissertation project and never stored in connection with the interview data at any time.

Moreover, I will terminate interviewing you whenever you feel uncomfortable with your participations during the course of interview. Thus, you have the right to withdraw from participating in this research at all times. If you decide to withdraw from this study, I will immediately delete the data collected during your interview. So, your interview will be entirely excluded from this study.

There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions about their identities. The risk of breach of confidentiality is also a potential risk, but in order to ensure the protection of participants, data will be transcribed by the researcher and then stored on a University computer requiring password access. Following the completion of data analysis, the data will be destroyed from the computer. All identifiable information such as name and date of birth, will not be collected. After we remove all identifiers, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

The findings emerged from this research may be published in academic journals or a book in addition to my dissertation. Before my submission, I will send the manuscript(s) to you if you

want to make sure that you are represented in a way you hope. If you raise disagreement and/or request clarification, I will correct the manuscript(s) accordingly.

The findings from this project will provide information on how LBQT women articulate their everyday life experiences in relation to their body. If published, results will be presented in summary form mainly and if direct quotes are used, names will not be associated with the quotes. I acknowledge that the nature of this project can potentially result in stigmatization, due to the way that sexual orientation and body size can both function as avenues of discrimination. Thus, the breach of confidentiality as a potential risk is common.

While no direct benefit will be promised, a possible societal benefit resulting from participating in this study is for you to articulate/rearticulate their everyday LBQT life experiences in relation to body size. You may generate a better understanding of their self, their desires, and your body, however there is no direct benefit from participating in this research.

If you have any questions regarding this research and/or would like to have some time to consider your participation in this research, please feel free to let me know. You can contact either Shinsuke Eguchi, Ph.D. or Hannah R. Long. Their contact information is:

Shinsuke Eguchi
Office 233
MSC03 2240
1 University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001
Office (505)277-5305
seguchi@unm.edu

Hannah R. Long
Office 155
MSC03 2240
1 University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001
Cell: (484) 553-7710
hannahrlong@unm.edu

If you would like to speak with someone else other than me, you may call the Office of Institutional Review Board (OIRB) at the University of New Mexico at (505)277-2644, irb.unm.edu. The OIRB is a group of people who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. You may also learn about your rights as a research participant through the OIRB website. This study's OIRB number is #

I strongly appreciate if you choose to participate in this research.

Best regards,

Shinsuke Eguchi and Hannah Long

Appendix C Interview Guide

Topic One: Subjective Identity Position

1. How do you describe who you are? What words would you say first come to mind when you think about what makes you you?
2. How do you see who you are in the mainstream U.S. American cultures? In other words, where do you see yourself fitting in with other people?
3. How do you see who you are in the U.S. American LGBTQ communities?
4. What has it been like for you to recognize your non-heterosexual orientation?
5. How do you define your sexuality? And why?
6. Do you identify with this particular sexual identity label? If so, why does that particular label work for you?
7. How do you define queer? Do you see yourself as queer?
8. What elements do you think continue to define queerness or the LGBTQ community within the mainstream culture and media? If you had to come up with three words that described mainstream LGBTQ culture, what would those words be?
9. How do you evaluate your performance of gender and sexuality? What effects the choices you make in how you perform your gender and sexual identities?
10. What kinds of people are you attracted to? Why?
11. What kinds of bodies are you attracted to? Why?
12. How would you describe your body? Why?
13. Do you feel comfortable around people of a different body size than you?
14. Do you feel represented within the queer community?
15. Do you feel comfortable around other LBQT women?

Topic Two: Others' Reactions on Identity Performance

1. How do you think others would describe who you are? If your best friend was describing you, what words would they use?
2. How do you think that others describe who you are in the context of mainstream U.S. American culture? In other words, how do you think others would see where you fit in?
3. How do you think that others describe who you are in the U.S. American LGBTQ community?
4. How do you think that others describe your sexuality?
5. How do you think that others would describe your gender performance?
6. How do you think that others view the people you are attracted to? Why?
7. How do you think that other people describe your body?
8. How do you think that mainstream culture would describe your body?
9. How do you think others in the LBQT community would describe your body?

Topic Three: Body Size and Intersectionality

1. What are some challenges about being in the LBQT community or being labelled as being part of the LBQT community?
2. What are some challenges about being queer and all of the other aspects of your identity? In other words, how do you negotiate your race, ethnicity, body size, ability and queerness, among others?

3. What are some challenges about being queer and a person of size?
4. Have you heard the term fat? What do you think about using the term fat?
5. What kinds of challenges do you have in your sexual and intimate relationships?
6. What kinds of challenges do you have in finding your sexual and intimate partners?
7. What kinds of challenges do you have in regards to your body size?
8. Do you ever experience discrimination because of your body size? If so, what?
9. What do you like about being a part of LBQT communities?
10. What do you dislike about being a part of LBQT communities?
11. What are the types of people you observe other LBQT women being attracted to? Why?
12. Do you feel that your body is desired within the LBQT communities? Within your specific LBQT communities?
13. What challenges are occurring with the LBQT communities?

Topic Four: Other Questions

1. Do you have any advice for other LBQT women, especially in regards to how they understand their bodies?
2. Are there any other issues you would like to discuss?

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