LOVE OUR BODIES, LOVE OURSELVES:
THE POLITICS OF BEAUTY IN CONSUMER AND DIGITAL CULTURES

By
DARA PERSIS MURRAY

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in
Communication, Information and Library Studies
Written under the direction of
Dr. Jack Bratich
and approved by

________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________

New Brunswick, New Jersey
January 2015
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Love Our Bodies, Love Ourselves:
The Politics of Beauty in Consumer and Digital Cultures

By DARA PERSIS MURRAY

Dissertation Director:
Dr. Jack Bratich

This project examines the relationship between feminism and media culture over the last century. It concentrates on the emergent “love your body” discourse in consumer culture, and how women utilize digital media to negotiate its messages. To illuminate the meanings and practices related to this discourse, I provide textual analyses of celebrity Kate Moss, the reality television program America's Next Top Model, and the integrated marketing campaign, The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. To consider women’s online participation in relation to this discourse, I engaged in observation of three online communities that center on appearance, weight, and health: fat acceptance, wannarexics (women who want to “be anorexic”), and weight-loss surgery patients. A cultural history of the strategies employed by beauty brands around corporate-sponsored empowerment provides a backdrop for understanding these six sites.

This multi-method and interdisciplinary research revealed what I have termed a “self-love subjectivity” that occurs through women’s online communication about beauty. These subjects work to love their bodies -- and therefore themselves -- through assembling in communities that self-identify through labels (“fatties,” “anas,” “WLS-ers”), thereby replicating consumer concepts and practices by packaging their aesthetic
values as personal brands. Self-love subjectivity, a concept that defines a set of neoliberal meanings and practices as well as an affect, captures the ways in which users take in contemporary consumer messages about beauty and empowerment to form themselves. Their sense of self underscores the pursuit of self-esteem and transformation, and also indicates narcissism, self-promotion, hope, and struggle. This self references the history of entanglements between feminism and media, indicating a potential trajectory from a self-help culture to a self-love culture. Ultimately, users remain attached to the notion of loving their bodies, but continue to be dissatisfied with their appearance and with themselves, suggesting conflicted support for cultural norms of female beauty and with the postfeminist focus on the body. Self-love subjectivity, then, leads women to create themselves around the values of neoliberal postfeminist media culture and appears to leave aside resistance to or critique of the political context, especially regarding norms for women's beauty/bodies.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to thank who have been alongside me in the process of researching and writing this dissertation. I could not have had a better advisor than Dr. Jack Bratich, whose perceptive intellect and guidance have been instrumental in this project and to my growth as a confident scholar. Special thanks to Dr. Nancy Hewitt for her gracious insights and positivity, Dr. David Greenberg for knowledgeably helping me to communicate accessible and informed interdisciplinary scholarship, and Dr. Aram Sinnreich for his thought-provoking questions.

Colleagues and friends at Rutgers, the 2010 National Communication Association Doctoral Honors Seminar, and several Console-ing Passions conferences have been sources of inspiration and contemplation over the years. I would also like to thank my students from Rutgers and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, particularly from the courses "Beauty, Feminism, and the Media: From Print to YouTube," "Beauty, Postfeminism, and Consumer Culture," and "Decoding Contemporary Visual Culture." Their excitement when learning the concepts that stimulated me to enter graduate school bolstered me along, and their fresh perspectives valuably influenced this work.

Emotional support from my family and friends has illuminated my dissertation journey. I especially appreciate Betsy, Marc, Gillian, Jana, Deborah, Mary Jane, Andrew, PJ, Gracie, Mimsy, Phil, Nicole, Tom, Phyllis, and Gram for their encouragement. Additionally, I fondly acknowledge GS and Ak for the meaningful roles that they have played in my life. Thank you to Brooks and Sylvie for their dog kisses, comfort, and letting me know when I've been sitting at the computer too long. My greatest thanks go to my parents Judy and Stu and my husband Scott. Since I am a private person, I will just
say this here: you three are the most important people in my life. I am lucky for you and for what each of you have contributed to my experiences as a person and an academic; my gratitude for your understanding while I've been dissertating is immeasurable. I love you so much. Scott, I'm excited to see where life takes us next. The diss is done!
DEDICATION

For my mom.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract of the Dissertation..............................................................ii
Acknowledgements............................................................................iv
Dedication.........................................................................................vi
Table of Contents..............................................................................vii
List of Figures....................................................................................xi

INTRODUCTION..................................................................................1
Overview of the Research Project......................................................1
Chapter Breakdown...........................................................................8

CHAPTER 1: FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY........12
Locating Beauty in Contemporary Culture and in Relation to the Self........12
   Postfeminist Media Culture, Neoliberalism, Feminism, and Beauty......16
   Postfeminist Self-Branding and Immaterial/Affective Labor............33
   Affect and Beauty........................................................................42
Methodology.......................................................................................48
Research Questions...........................................................................49
Interpretive Analysis........................................................................50
Textual Analysis of Cultural Figures: Additional Theories.................52
Analysis of Online Communities: Method and Additional Theories.....56
   Selection of Subjects, Communities, and Sites..............................58
Understanding the Meanings of "Rexy" through Artistic Texts ............. 121
  Statue 1: Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment) ........................................ 122
  Statue 2: Siren ......................................................................................... 125
"Rexy:" A Value Signifying Postfeminist Disorder .................................. 128
Tyra Banks, America's Next Top Model, and "Fierce" .............................. 129
  Banks' Brand and America's Next Top Model ........................................ 132
  Laboring for a "Fierce" Self .................................................................... 135
  Assessing "Fierce:" Transformation, Self-Esteem, and Future Success .. 140
(Post)feminist Activism via a Beauty Brand ............................................. 141
  Producing CFRB: A Feminist (Approved) Strategy? ............................ 143
  CFRB's "Real Beauty:" Self-Esteem and Body Acceptance ..................... 146
    Print Launch: CFRB's Manifesto ......................................................... 147
    Product Launch: Dove Firming Lotion ................................................. 149
    Dove Self-Esteem Fund's Viral Video: "True Colors" ......................... 151
    Participating in a Brand Community to Be a "Real Beauty" .............. 152
Final Thoughts ......................................................................................... 155

CHAPTER 4: THREE BEAUTY-CENTERED ONLINE COMMUNITIES: FAT
  ACCEPTANCE, WANNAREXIC, AND WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY .......... 160
Sites of Inquiry ....................................................................................... 160
Analyzing Online Communities ............................................................. 179
  Postfeminist Self-Branding ................................................................. 179
LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. Kate Upton - *Vogue* cover

Fig. 2. Victoria's Secret "Love My Body Campaign" image

Fig. 3. Comparison of Victoria's Secret and Dove Campaign for Real Beauty images

Fig. 4. Nancy Upton - American Apparel image

Fig. 5. Nancy Upton - American Apparel image

Fig. 6. Ralph Lauren photoshopped image

Fig. 7. Model from photoshopped Ralph Lauren image in another advert

Fig. 8. Tracey Gold - *People Magazine* cover

Fig. 9. The Body Shop advert featuring Ruby

Fig. 10. The Body Shop advert featuring Ruby

Fig. 11. Kate Moss - Calvin Klein advert

Fig. 12. Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment)

Fig. 13. Fasting Buddha

Fig. 14. Siren

Fig. 15. Dancing Shiva

Fig. 16. Dove Campaign for Real Beauty Manifesto

Fig. 17. CFRB: "Wrinkled? Wonderful?"

Fig. 18. CFRB: "Gray? Gorgeous?"

Fig. 19. CFRB: "Flawed? Flawless?"

Fig. 20. CFRB: "Half Empty? Half Full?"

Fig. 21. CFRB: "Oversized? Outstanding?"

Fig. 22. Dove Firming advert
Fig. 23. PL: Meghan
Fig. 24. PL: Gretchen
Fig. 25. PL: Alexis
Fig. 26. PL: Gili
Fig. 27. PL: Shan
Fig. 28. PL: Crystal
Fig. 29. PL: Meghan's recent Twitter image
Fig. 30. PL: Meghan's recent Instagram image
Fig. 31. AC: ajonadiet
Fig. 32. AC: ed_surreal
Fig. 33. AC: fishgirl415
Fig. 34. AC: littlemisspoo
Fig. 35. AC: mis_ana_thropic
Fig. 36. AC: misa_mc
Fig. 37. AC: run4skinny
Fig. 38. AC: image posted by run4skinny
Fig. 39. AC: image posted by run4skinny
Fig. 40. Example of thinspiration
Fig. 41. WLS: Jen pre-op
Fig. 42. WLS: Jen post-op
Fig. 43. WLS: Stephanie pre-op
Fig. 44. WLS: Stephanie post-op
Fig. 45. WLS: Nicole pre-op
Fig. 46. WLS: Nicole post-op
Fig. 47. WLS: Katie pre-op
Fig. 48. WLS: Katie post-op
Fig. 49. WLS: Kristen pre-op
Fig. 50. WLS: Kristen post-op
Fig. 51. WLS: Martha pre-op
Fig. 52. WLS: Martha post-op
Fig. 53. WLS: Debbie pre-op
Fig. 54. WLS: Debbie post-op
Fig. 55. WLS: Dani pre-op
Fig. 56. WLS: Dani post-op
Fig. 57. WLS: Kelly pre-op
Fig. 58. WLS: Kelly post-op
Fig. 59. WLS: Micola pre-op
Fig. 60. WLS: Micola post-op
Fig. 61. WLS: Nicole - selfie
Fig. 62. WLS: Debbie - "sexy" image
Fig. 63. American Eagle unretouched image
Fig. 64. American Eagle unretouched image
Fig. 65. Scarlett Johansson - *Vanity Fair* makeup free image
Fig. 66. Beyoncé makeup free selfie
Fig. 67. Lady Gaga makeup free selfie
INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Research Project

In May 2013, the ABC News website ran an article with the title, "Kate Upton to Critics: 'I Love My Body.'" The quote in the subtitle was extracted from an interview in Vogue magazine. Kate Upton, an up-and-coming "curvy" (but not plus size) model, had appeared in the coveted Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue for the past two years, and she was Vogue's cover girl of the month (Fig. 1). Upton was responding to comments (which had spread online and then were picked up by popular media outlets) made by an unknown female blogger who portrayed Upton's walk in a fashion show as akin to "confidently lumbering up the runway like there's a buffet at the end of it." She described Upton's figure as a "little piggie" with "huge thighs, NO waist, big fat floppy boobs, terrible body definition" (Clarke 2013). In response to such criticism, Upton promoted a message of love and acceptance, stating, "I love my body....I feel confident with myself, and if that inspires other women to feel confident with their bodies, great" (Widdicombe 2013). Upton clearly does not struggle with her body/beauty -- in fact, she loves it and herself.

For many women, Upton epitomizes female beauty in the early twenty-first century. Yet, for others, she does not -- and those with access to digital media technologies can let their voices be heard. These technologies offer people opportunities for all sorts of expression about bodies: their own and others', including support of as well as disdain for traditionally attractive (or unattractive) bodies. And, although Upton was at the center of the aforementioned social media controversy, it was, in fact, because of her appearance in and use of digital media technology that she was afforded public visibility and a thriving career. Since 2008, Upton has been a working model signed with
the top agency, Elite. It was not until 2011, however, that she shot to fame. That year, in addition to an appearance in Sports Illustrated, Upton became known to audiences through two YouTube videos of her dancing that went viral: as of this writing, the first has had 2 million hits, and the second, in which she dances in a bikini, has had 16 million hits. The interest in Upton is palpable: she was the fourth most popular Yahoo! search for 2012, trailing the Presidential Election, the iPhone5, and celebrity Kim Kardashian (Oldenburg 2012).

Upton's claim to love her body reflects mainstream discourse about beauty in early twenty-first century consumer culture, although that mantra carries different meanings not only for different women but also for different corporations. For instance, the 2010 Victoria's Secret "Love My Body Campaign" (Fig. 2) introduced new items to its best-selling "Body by Victoria" collection. The similarities between this campaign and the popular Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, evidenced in the positioning and styling of the models and the campaign messaging, drew the attention of a user who created a composite image of the two sets of images (Fig. 3). While illustrating similarities in composition and messaging, the bodies celebrated in these campaigns are quite distinct. When the composite was circulated online, it prompted blog and vlog commentaries and critiques while also spreading the image itself across social media platforms.

Such critical interpretations of media texts by people in online spaces have resonated with others who seek to challenge the beauty industry's contradictory messages. For instance, in 2011, Nancy Upton (no relation to Kate) entered and won American Apparel's Next Big Thing, an online plus size model search. As a means of protesting the brand's hypersexual advertisements with super thin models, she entered
photographs (Figs. 4-5) of herself, scantily clad, gorging on food (such as pies, chicken, salad dressing, and ice cream). Ironically, though, American Apparel did not pick up on her subversive intention, and crowned her winner of the contest (only later to retract it after understanding that Upton's images were of a mocking nature). A different means of deconstructing beauty images was illustrated in a 2009 Photoshop scandal (Figs. 6-7), wherein a user on the group blog Boing Boing uploaded an offending Ralph Lauren advertisement of a model ultra-slimmerized via Photoshop and placed it next to a photo of the already-slim model. This compare/contrast image generated posts about the disproportion of the model's body, as well its emaciated appearance, and spread throughout various blogs and online sites (including online versions of newspapers, posts on Facebook and Twitter, and popular blogs). Again, however, all these posts also circulated the Ralph Lauren image and logo.

Reflecting on how individuals were using online spaces to intervene in consumer culture-created meanings of beauty, I became intrigued by the possibilities that digital culture could offer women for creating social change. More specifically, I wondered whether participation in online exchanges and commentaries could aid women in experiencing their bodies differently. As importantly, could such efforts transform academic and popular understandings (see Chapter 1), whereby women and girls live in a narrative of self-hatred and flawed bodies since their bodies do not emulate beauty norms and they continually struggle with this knowledge. These inquiries were inspired by my academic interests, and are also motivated by my personal and professional experiences with issues relating to beauty. Throughout my life, I have heard stories about my grandparents as manufacturers of women's blouses and skirts. In the 1950s, they had an
active showroom in New York City's Garment District where executives, models, designers, salesmen, and buyers congregated; in the 1960s, they owned a manufacturing plant in the South. I came to understand that, for them, fashion was a harsh and competitive business (though a good way of earning money), required the skills of creative people, and intertwined their own and society’s perceptions of beauty. Before graduate school, I, too, was part of the beauty industry’s machinery, having worked in advertising on mass cosmetic and fashion brands. This experience provided me insight into the creation of beauty texts as well as the development and implementation of brand strategy to create desired perceptions about beauty in prospective customers.

Of course, whether people work in the beauty industry or not, they are affected by its ideologies, which can influence the nature of women's self-concepts, socialization and social life. Beginning in middle school and continuing beyond college, many of my friends and peers followed orange-only diets, not so mysteriously headed to the bathroom after meals, and communicated varying levels of awareness that they had a disordered relationship with food. When I was in high school, "heroin chic" models like Kate Moss took the fashion world by storm, and Tracey Gold, an actress from one of my favorite childhood television shows (Growing Pains), went public about her "battle with anorexia" in People magazine. At the time, the cover piqued my interest (Fig. 8): wearing a maroon cardigan, matching lipstick, and with her hair in an up-do, Gold did not appear to be the face of death. Next to her body, though, the headline screamed that she was "Starving for Beauty." The pursuit of beauty felt dire. Then, I read Naomi Wolf's 1990 book *The Beauty Myth* (given to me by my mother), which opened up new perspectives on my experiences. Understanding the cultural and gendered dynamics at play regarding beauty
and its commercial production helped me create a critical buffer between how I engaged in self-assessments about my appearance and how my body compared to Kate's and Tracey's.

For feminists, beauty has long posed a dilemma that stems from questions about subjectivity; that is, what are the ways in which female subjects embody cultural meanings of beauty and how/why do they engage in its practices? In 2003, philosopher Ann. J. Cahill asked, "does participation in socially demanded forms of beautification necessarily hinder women's ability to function as equal, autonomous beings?" (43). Cultural studies scholar Rita Felski extended this question in 2006 by querying the relationship between feminist thought and beauty: "is there a place in feminist thought for what we might call a positive aesthetic, an affirmation, however conditional, of the value of beauty and aesthetic pleasure?" (275). In 2008, feminist media studies scholar Rosalind Gill expressed concerns that centered on the experience of the individual regarding her internalization of beauty ideals; that is, can women understand beauty "not as external impositions but as authentically ours" (2008a, 436)?

This project takes another step forward in understanding textual meanings of beauty as well as women's experiences of beauty by examining them in a contemporary context: the current postfeminist, digital age. The key research questions guiding this project are:

What are the current entanglements of feminism and media culture around beauty? And how is their configuration communicated to audiences via industries, celebrities, and brands?

What meanings and experiences emerge from the participation of women in digital culture as they navigate consumer culture's intertwined meanings about female beauty and power in new ways? More specifically, what do their digital media practices and expression of values about female
beauty/bodies suggest about the formation of contemporary subjectivity in postfeminist media culture? And, in what ways do women's affects (feelings) related to beauty complicate the meanings of this subjectivity?

These questions situate this project in the context of long-standing works on beauty politics and media but, distinctively, with a focus on illuminating an emerging conflicted, self-governing, gendered subjectivity in relation to beauty that accounts for affective experiences of the body. To respond to these queries, I use a multidisciplinary interpretive framework, textual analysis, and online observation to explore the ways in which cultural figures who embody postfeminist values and women who struggle with their non-hegemonic bodies engage in self-branding and the production of affect.

The subjects for this study include three cultural figures and three online communities. The cultural figures are examined as models of postfeminist empowerment regarding the body/beauty: the celebrity image of fashion supermodel Kate Moss, the reality television program America's Next Top Model created by fashion supermodel Tyra Banks, and an integrated marketing campaign, The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. The online communities -- fat acceptance vloggers, wannarexic (women who want to "be anorexic") bloggers, and post-operative weight loss surgery patient vloggers -- offer an understanding of women's expression related to values and feelings around beauty.

My project reveals what I have termed a "self-love subjectivity." This term captures the ways in which women in online communities take in cultural messages about beauty/bodies and form themselves as subjects through their feelings about and values/practices of love for the self, particularly in relation to self-esteem and transformation, narcissism and self-promotion, and hope and struggle. This self highlights women's conflicts with the postfeminist focus on the body as key to female
identity and empowerment, linking the history of entanglements between feminism and media culture, the values disseminated by cultural figures in postfeminist media culture, and contemporary women who participate in digital culture to discuss their own bodies and beauty. It surfaces a tension between everyday women's desires to live in bodies that they feel are beautiful in order to love themselves and the constraints placed on this desire by cultural norms.

This research identifies a meaningful site for scholarship concerned with contemporary intersections of female subjectivity, postfeminism, self-branding, affect, and the production and consumption of media messages of beauty. It also offers a feminist media studies critique that contributes to the following theoretical areas:

_Feminist media studies conceptions of postfeminism and beauty_. I elucidate the ways in which the consumer culture strategy of postfeminist self-branding has been normalized across media texts in popular culture (celebrity, reality television, branding campaigns). I also communicate how women who have grown up in a neoliberal era have connected Western consumer culture messages of beauty with power and its associated meanings of empowerment and popular feminism. In particular, I relate these topics to concepts of labor for women (as "women's work"). This research recognizes the relevance of postfeminism for unpacking women's self-concepts in relation to beauty norms in contemporary culture.

_Media studies work on self-branding in digital culture_. This research extends current theory about self-branding in online communities, especially how it constructs a neoliberal female subjectivity in contemporary Western consumer culture that stresses hegemonic femininity and postfeminist values. In so doing, I connect themes of
narcissism, self-promotion, intimacy/vulnerability to the practice of postfeminist self-branding. Further, this project illuminates the relations between self-branding and neoliberal values (postfeminism) around beauty, and self-branding in relation to embodied affect regarding beauty and self-love.

*Interdisciplinary theories on affect.* This project contributes to research on affect in relation to the experience of beauty in postfeminist, consumer, and digital contexts. I reveal how cultural figures engage in the production of affect around meanings of beauty and postfeminism in consumer culture. I also advance the literature by elucidating how young women negotiate meanings of beauty online via self-love as an embodied affect that emerges through their online participation and through their affective relationships with members in communities formed around distinctive values of beauty.

**Chapter Breakdown**

Chapter 1: Framework and Methodology for the Study

This chapter highlights the prominent themes for this project: feminist analyses of beauty culture and embodiment; postfeminist media culture; the neoliberal practice of self-branding; and conceptions of immaterial/affective labor, especially as they relate to the pursuit of beauty. I detail how postfeminism and self-branding (especially as it occurs online) have facilitated and normalized values and practices in contemporary culture, and are important factors to recognize in early twenty-first century women's formation of subjectivity. I then articulate how studying women's affective communication offers an important lens through which to consider their meanings of beauty.

Finally, after introducing the context and the methodology for this study, I provide the central research questions and detail the methods through which I explore
them. The methods discussed are Interpretive Analysis, Textual Analysis, and Online Observation. The section on Online Observation is divided into (a) Selection of Subjects, Communities, and Sites; (b) Data Collection, which is further broken down into Observations of Groups, Recording, and Process, and (c) Additional Theories. I also outline the Research Process and Institutional Research Board Approval Process.

Chapter 2: The Politics of Beauty: A Cultural History

This chapter provides a cultural history that serves as a backdrop for several themes that are important for the present study. In the first section, I articulate the ways in which consumer culture meanings of hegemonic beauty link an inability to attain it to negative views of the body for women. In the second section, I examine feminist relations to beauty culture by highlighting key moments of entanglement between self-identified feminists, feminism, and beauty in consumer culture. Covering advertising and women's magazines that were produced in the twentieth century, I detail the relations of self-identified feminists and female consumers in the production and consumption of beauty texts in early consumer culture. This section also looks at how consumer culture strategies have drawn on and promoted meanings of feminism, illustrating the ways in which media texts have contributed to the entanglement of meanings about feminism and beauty in popular culture from the 1970s through 2000. Finally, the third section explores how "love your body" messaging in consumer culture signals another tension in its meanings by sitting at the nexus of efforts by self-identified feminists, feminist values, and beauty. In addition, I present the concept of self-love from primarily feminist and philosophical perspectives, focusing on how its associated meanings of self-respect, self-
esteem, and narcissism signal a theoretical tension in understanding self-love. Thus self-love, as an affect related to the subjects' values of beauty, is illuminated in this project.

By articulating feminism's vexed relationship with consumer culture through a history of the intersections between self-identified feminists, feminist values, and beauty, I present in this chapter a nuanced picture of the production and consumption of meanings of beauty and female power in twentieth century consumer culture.

Chapter 3: Three Cases of Postfeminist Self-Branding: Kate Moss, Tyra Banks and America's Next Top Model, and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty

This chapter presents notable popular texts about beauty that are located in the postfeminist media culture of the 1990s and early 2000s to elucidate the practice of postfeminist self-branding. These texts include: the celebrity image of fashion supermodel Kate Moss (communicating "rexy"), the reality television program America's Next Top Model created by fashion supermodel Tyra Banks (communicating "fierce"), and an integrated marketing campaign -- The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (communicating "real beauty"). The branding strategies of all these texts are explored in terms of their communication of neoliberal values and the practices of postfeminism and self-branding around beauty. I also study the production of affect by these three cultural figures.

Chapter 4: Three Online Beauty-Centered Communities: Fat Acceptance, Wannarexic, and Weight Loss Surgery

In this chapter, I examine three online communities according to their practices of postfeminist self-branding and their meanings of self-love as they relate to values of beauty. These groups include: the online Fat Acceptance (FA) community via the YouTube channel Project Lifesize; wannarexics within the online pro-ana (pro-anorexia)
Livejournal community ana_circle; and bariatric surgery patients in the online YouTube Weight Loss Surgery. The analysis illuminates the ways in which these practices and meanings constitute a conflicted contemporary female subjectivity that is supported by digital culture. Moreover, I articulate the users' affective process about beauty in relation to hope and "cruel optimism" (Berlant).

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Future Directions

This chapter discusses how, across the three cultural figures and the three online communities, women's politics of representation speak to a complex formation of gendered subjectivity. I elucidate the meanings of women's self-love as a self-branded postfeminist, neoliberal value that highlights lack of struggle for the cultural figures and an ongoing struggle for the users with their bodies/beauty and feelings about themselves. Finally, I propose self-respect as a more productive way in which women can relate to themselves and their beauty/bodies while living in postfeminist media culture.
CHAPTER 1: FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

This chapter maps out important notions of postfeminism as a foundation for understanding values of feminism and beauty in contemporary society. First, I present the terminology and discourses of postfeminism, and how they attach to neoliberalism. I also provide an overview of, and discuss the ways in which, postfeminist values relate to beauty and to feminist work on beauty and embodiment. Theories on self-branding and immaterial/affective labor are then discussed, outlining how postfeminist subjectivity is produced through neoliberal practices that advocate work on the self, especially in regard to the body and emotions. Finally, I articulate how studying women's affective communication offers an important lens through which to consider their feelings of beauty beyond postfeminism. These theories provide a framework for understanding the subjects of this study: three cultural forms (Kate Moss, Tyra Banks/America's Next Top Model, The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty) and three online communities (fat acceptance, wannarexic, weight loss surgery). Finally, I describe the methodology for the study, including the research questions, and detail the methods through which I respond to them.

Locating Beauty in Contemporary Culture and in Relation to the Self

At this current moment, there is a problematic relationship between women and their bodies that is couched within a cultural context that emphatically privileges thin bodies and fuses them with female subjectivity. The female body that is promoted by the beauty industry (understood here as the businesses that inform women's production of beauty: advertisements, magazines, cosmetics, fashion, television programs, and so forth) diverges from most of the bodies that reflect our cultural and physical reality. Over the
last thirty years, the prevalence of obesity has developed into a public health crisis in the United States. According to 2013 statistics advanced by the American Heart Association, there are 74.8 million American women, aged 20 and older, who qualify as overweight or obese. A June 2013 Gallup report anticipated that the U.S. obesity rate would be 27.1%, which is higher than the previous year ("U.S. Obesity Rate" 2013). Growing up in a culture marked by a "moral panic" (Patterson and Johnston 2012) about obesity, many women have developed "disordered relationships to their food and [to] fat [that] are greatly affecting their lives. Women have a common consciousness in the fear of fat" (Young 2005, 251).

Media images depicting ultra-slim bodies as the ideal figure have also been noted in relation to the development of eating disorders (Bordo 1993; Kilbourne 2000). According to 2013 statistics from the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, eating disorders -- including anorexia, bulimia, EDNOS (Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified), and BED (Binge Eating Disorder, a component of EDNOS) -- affect up to 24 million Americans ("Eating Disorder Statistics" 2013). Countering long-standing research that eating disorders only affect white, affluent women, recent studies have detailed that people with eating disorders include women of various race/ethnicities and socio-economic classes ("Eating Disorder Statistics" 2013).

A wealth of scholarship has been concerned with the impact of media messages on the body image of girls, with adolescence regarded as a critical juncture for well-being because of cultural influences, peer pressure, and the struggle to define personal and social identities. A girl may face many changes during puberty, such as in her appearance and in "the loss of her 'voice'" (Kilbourne 2000, 129; also Gilligan 1982; Pipher 1994). It
has also been argued that control of and attention to the body have become vital to the emotional development of female audiences, as "the body has become the central personal project of American girls…they believe that the body is the ultimate expression of self" (Brumberg 1997, 97; also Hesse-Biber 2006). This concern seems to be warranted: girls are heavily influenced by beauty messaging, with the key finding in a 2010 Girl Scout Research Institute study stating that "Almost nine in ten American teenage girls say they feel pressured by the fashion and media industries to be skinny" (Nichols and Reaney 2010).

Of central importance to this project is women's obsessive focus on the body in relation to the past and present entanglements of feminism and media culture around beauty. Tracing and examining these entanglements from the early twentieth to the early twenty-first century tells a story about the interrelations of feminism, women, and the beauty industry from both the production and consumption sides. The story has three components: self-identified feminists and women who participate in and around the beauty industry, cultural figures (celebrities, brands, entrepreneurs) that signify and define beauty, and users/audiences/consumers who form their subjectivity in relation to beauty at the contemporary cultural moment. This study, then, articulates the current configuration of feminism and media culture that occurs through industries, brands, and celebrities, and "everyday" women as it emerges around beauty across visual, popular, consumer, and digital cultures. Interpretive and interdisciplinary research addresses these three aspects of entanglements between feminism and media culture around the production of beauty culture (a culture informed by ideologies that are disseminated by
social institutions and companies that encompass the media, cosmetics, fashion, cosmetic surgery, and diet industries) in the United States over the last century.

Currently, the conflict that women have with their bodies is situated within consumer culture's meanings about "empowerment" in relation to beauty. This communication is exemplified by *Vogue* magazine. Appearing in each issue of *Vogue* and written by a member of the editorial staff, "Point of View" is a Fashion & Features section that describes fashion trends and inspirations for the photo shoots that appear in the issue at hand. In the April 2014 issue of *Vogue* magazine, the "Point of View" was titled "Our Bodies, Ourselves," which, in part, read:

Everyone knows - and just in case, soap and cereal companies are constantly reminding us - that a **woman's happiness** has a lot to do with how comfortable she is in her own skin. It's true, of course: if we accept that **our bodies are beautiful** and celebrate them in all their divine individuality, we gain a genuine measure of joy and **personal liberation** (not to mention sexual magnetism).... Can it be a challenge to jump aboard the self-love train and **embrace our shape** as triumphantly as **our cover star** or those **heavenly creatures** in our Shape portfolio? Sure - but that's one battle well worth joining. This month's fashion prescription, on the other hand, is easy peasy. (boldface in original text; "Our Bodies, Ourselves" 2014)

*Vogue's* language of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" draws on the tome of the same name by The Boston Women's Health Book Collective. Published in the 1970s, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has been a venerable work on women's health that places women's voices about their bodies front and center. This text views itself as providing a "combination of practical information with political critique and women's lived experiences...[this] is one of the reasons the book has remained one of the most enduring legacies of the women's movements that grew out of the late 1960s and early 1970s" (Norgian 2011, 16). The twenty-first anniversary edition expounds on the significance
of this approach, stating that the book "places women's experiences within the social, political, and economic forces that determine all of our lives, thus going beyond individualistic, narrow, 'self-care' and self-help approaches" (Staff of Boston Women’s Health Book Collective 1996, 21). *Our Bodies, Ourselves* sought to empower women in relationship with their bodies by offering information about women's health and shared stories about the female body.

*Vogue's* "Our Bodies, Ourselves" seemingly focuses on empowering women in their views and experiences of their bodies. Here, accessing happiness via acceptance of the body as beautiful carries with it an ostensibly feminist value of "personal liberation"; the realization of this empowerment stipulates "jump[ing] aboard the self-love train," possessing "sexual magnetism," and experiencing body acceptance by projected comparisons with a reality star and models. The "Point of View," though, does not engage women's experiences of their bodies (it is the view of a *Vogue*-er), nor is it a political critique regarding women's negative experiences of their bodies. Moreover, *Vogue*, a staple of beauty industry values, can be considered a problematic text for women's feelings about their bodies, rather than one that empowers them. Its employment of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" is an exemplar of the early twenty-first century entanglements of postfeminism and media around beauty, as is the communication of the cultural figures and members of online communities in this project.

**Postfeminist Media Culture, Neoliberalism, Feminism, and Beauty**

Emerging in the 1990s, postfeminism began to inform popular culture in the United States and the United Kingdom (Tasker and Negra 2007; Lazar 2009). Its immense power in western culture has been noted by feminist media studies scholar
Rosalind Gill, who names our current time a "postfeminist media culture" (2007a, 249). In this context, she contends, media texts advocate "obsessive preoccupation with the body" (Gill 2007b, 149) as a constructive value, and the body as a central site of attention since it is "presented as women’s key (if not sole) source of identity" (Gill 2007a, 255). Importantly, Gill notes, the nature of this communication engages meanings of feminism by conflating feminist notions of liberation with claims of women's freedom and choice in the marketplace, whereby "empowerment" occurs primarily through acts of consumerism. Notions related to the pursuit of beauty include self-improvement, personal responsibility, self-surveillance (especially of one's body), and self-governance for attaining social and economic mobility.

Postfeminism's discourses of individual responsibility, empowerment, and capability are located within the current neoliberal context. Neoliberalism emerged in the 1980s under Ronald Reagan's administration in the United States and Margaret Thatcher's in the UK. Different from liberalism's political philosophy, which stressed values of political freedom, equal participation in government, and policies to allow businesses to run independently (Montesquieu 1989), late twentieth century neoliberalism is a school of economic thought that emphasizes the power of unregulated economic growth and de-emphasizes government power to regulate that growth. By increasing corporate power and reducing social services/programs, neoliberal values and policies stressed self-responsibility among all people, regardless of their raced, classed, and gendered subject positions and the inequalities that they faced in regard to them (Martinez and Garcia n.d.). In response to the neoliberal climate, people pursued self-actualization, wherein they construct their identities as a "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens 1991, 169).
As scholars such as Nikolas Rose, Anthony Giddens, Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, Angela McRobbie, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay have noted, neoliberalism is an economic philosophy can be seen in social policies, media discourse, cultural values, and as part of individuals' subjectivities. Neoliberalism's policies (including deregulation, free markets, entrepreneurialism, and privatization) brought about significant political, social, and economic changes. As such, McRobbie (2008) describes neoliberalism as a form of citizenship and organization of the social that invades social life. By naturalizing the logics of enterprise, individuals engage in "neo-liberal [sic] forms of governmentality" (McRobbie 2008, 59) that can be understood as self-governing values and practices that denote rational behavior -- even if they may not be in an individual's best interest. Neoliberal subjects view themselves as calculated entrepreneurs of their own lives. For Rose (1989) this means that neoliberal subjects view themselves, ostensibly, as having the power and freedom to shape themselves based on their choices. Gill argues further that neoliberal subjects communicate narratives of their lives that position their wishes and goals as autonomous and "no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever" (2007b, 155). Ouelette and Hay highlight that an important neoliberal value is self-transformation, through which self-regulating individuals position themselves as having the freedom to attain "empowerment and well-being" (2008, 12). When this logic is internalized by actors, it becomes part of subjectivity, which is defined by Gill as "how the social or cultural 'gets inside,' and transforms and reshapes our relationships to ourselves and others" (2008a, 433).

In their edited collection, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivities* (2011), Gill and Christina Scharff contend that there is a three-fold synergy
between neoliberalism and postfeminism: (1) they both configure individualism as distinct from social or political control or forces; (2) there is a parallel between the "autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism...[and] the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism" (2011, 7); and (3) neoliberal popular culture discourses that stress self-regulation, self-discipline, and self-transformation as self-directed values emphasize them more for women than for men. This project address characteristics of neoliberalism to understand changes around feminism and beauty as they occur in postfeminist media culture, as in this neoliberal cultural landscape, "we have become responsible for the design of our bodies" (Giddens 1991, 102).

Postfeminism, importantly, has a knotty relationship with feminism. Broadly speaking, feminism coalesced in the late nineteenth century and continues to the present time, with feminists aiming to effect social, political, and economic change; specifically, they focus on issues that address women's equality in the public sphere and/or they look at how women's everyday lives can be genuinely positive, that is, the women neither accede to being socially constructed nor assume a role in which they are subordinate to men. The feminist movement has been identified as comprising multiple "waves," although the dates and orientations of each can differ according to the historiographer (Siegel 1997, 56). The "waves" are commonly recognized as follows, based on the predominant values for each group: the first wave occurred from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s and emphasized suffrage; the second wave occurred from the 1960s to the 1980s and concentrated on equal rights for women as a collective; and the third wave began in the 1990s and arguably extends to the present time, stressing each woman
as an individual with differences (race, sexual orientation, and so forth) (Siegel 1997). In an effort to move beyond the meanings of the "wave" metaphor, which homogenizes and compartmentalizes the ideologies and actions of each major strand of the feminist movement, historian Nancy Hewitt works to "think about other types of waves, such as radio waves, that offer new conceptualizations of the feminist past…Radio waves allow us to think about movements in terms of different lengths and frequencies…signals co-exist, overlap, and intersect" (2010, 10-11). Hewitt’s conception of the numerous feminist positions emphasizes an understanding of the complexities in women's emotional and historical connections to one another; this approach paints a rich history of feminists' triumphs and sites that require feminist involvement.

According to feminist media studies scholars Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, postfeminism is "a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated" (2007, 1). Postfeminism "suggests a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the more familiar framing concept of 'backlash' allows" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 1). While the argument in the popular tome Backlash (Faludi, 1991) is that media messages promote problematic meanings about being a career woman, Gill and Scharff (2011) propose that postfeminism can be conceived of as a backlash against feminism itself; that is, postfeminism allies with the view that gender equality has been achieved in the public sphere and, subsequently, that feminist politics are no longer necessary. The focus of female "empowerment" is for the individual, instead of for women as a collective group,
distinguishing it from a focus on collective organizing for social change, as in the second "wave" of the feminist movement.

Along these lines, postfeminist notions of women's freedom and choice are linked to the marketplace, whereby, McRobbie (2008) argues, "empowerment" occurs primarily through acts of consumerism rather than acts for advancement in the public sphere. Embodied in "the figure of woman as empowered consumer" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 2) is a self that resides at the intersection of consumerism and neoliberal governmentality. According to McRobbie (2008), this woman is "a knowable subject...[whose] citizenship [stands] in directions contrary to those of public-mindedness, political participation, democratic accountability, social welfare and...the feminist ethic of care" (533). The postfeminist citizen links meanings of empowerment and choice to ideological and material consumption. Postfeminism, then, is a strategy of "empowerment" for the economically advantaged, and its proponents are, "by default" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 2), Caucasian and middle class.

Postfeminism, moreover, promotes values and practices of beauty that diverge from earlier feminist viewpoints. Negra notes that, in the postfeminist context, "beautification discourses place strong stress on the achieved self" (2008, 119) and values work on the body that integrates notions of female self-care, self-surveillance, and self-esteem (Negra 2008). Postfeminism further promotes the pursuit of beauty as a constructive value that supports self-improvement, personal responsibility, self-surveillance (especially of one's body), and self-governance for attaining social and economic mobility. Significantly, Gill advances that postfeminism can be interpreted
as "a sensibility" (2007a, 254) characterized by "themes, tropes and constructions"
(2007a, 255) circulating in media messages, including:

the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from
objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance,
monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and
empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; the articulation or
entanglement of feminist and antifeminist ideas…and an emphasis upon
consumerism and the commodification of difference. (Gill 2007a, 255)

Gill and Scharff, along with Tasker and Negra, discuss postfeminism in relation to
beauty. Postfeminism situates the pursuit of beauty as key to a socially acceptable
identity, and its representations of beauty encourage conformity with Caucasian,
hypersexualized women who express their "empowerment" through spending money to
transform their bodies and championing self-surveillance and self-sexualization (Gill
2007a, 260; Tasker and Negra 2007, 2). In postfeminism, "women are required to work
on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their
actions as freely chosen" (Gill and Scharff 2011, 7). Postfeminism emphasizes the
importance of beauty by emphatically expressing femininity via the female body,
disseminating messages that it "requir[es] constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline
and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower
judgments of female attractiveness" (Gill 2007a, 255). The pursuit of beauty entails
ideological and material consumption that leads to the self-construction of a specific body
appearance. Additionally, this body is adorned with beauty industry-approved
commodities such as cosmetics and fashionable clothing; as such, postfeminism "has
offered new rationales for guilt-free consumerism, substantially reenergizing beauty
culture" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 3). Gill contends that postfeminist women view
themselves as "using beauty' to make themselves feel good" (2007a, 260). Yet,
postfeminist self-styling offers a one-dimensional view of female beauty that does not reflect diversity in class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or ability. Significantly, postfeminist discourse and media representations of Caucasian, sexualized, and economically empowered women are the predominant images employed in consumer culture, thus aligning this "empowered" viewpoint with the Western ideal of female beauty.

Feminist media studies scholar Angela McRobbie argues that within this body-obsessed context, female body dissatisfaction is present to such an epidemic degree that it has become a normative pathology, which she calls "unhealthy femininity" (2008, 96). This "postfeminist disorder," as she calls it (McRobbie 2008, 96), is manifested in conditions such as eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental illness, and "provides a vocabulary for understanding the female bodily-ego as prone to anxiety, as lacking in certain respects, as insufficient in regard to self-esteem" (McRobbie 2008, 98). This postfeminist disorder entraps women in self-abusing cycles that are reinforced by cultural values. The presentation of a sexualized body, with its mandatory emphasis on heterosexuality, can also be seen as indicative of postfeminist disorder. Problematically, this body, which suggests indulgence in pleasure, Gill contends, is often portrayed by women as their "source of power" (2007b, 149). Negra adds that "postfeminism fetishizes female power and desire while consistently placing these within firm limits" (2008, 4), therein minimizing cultural meanings of female control by defining the pleasures of female sexuality within limited hegemonic boundaries. Postfeminism, in this regard, subordinates women by reinforcing a male/female binary that privileges patriarchy as part of the Western cultural-economic structure. For McRobbie (2008), postfeminist
disorder addresses while simultaneously denounces female power, producing subjects with "new and even more subtle modes of regulation" and conditions of self-harm that are "normalized and even glamorized" (110) through its poster girls (such as the iconic Kate Moss; see analysis in Chapter 3).

The aforementioned postfeminist values of beauty stand in contrast to many prior feminist theories on beauty and embodiment, wherein the core of feminist politics is a concern for the liberation of women from the oppression of cultural (patriarchal) norms, with varying emphases on deconstructing institutional structures in order "to reconstruct society in a way that...[it is] fully inclusive of women's desires and purposes" (Osborne 2002). Since the second wave of the feminist movement, feminists have been wary of consumer culture's norms for women. These norms were critiqued in the widely read book by Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, which argued that consumer culture preyed on the vulnerabilities of affluent women to trap them in a false, unsatisfying self-image that rendered them passive caretakers of their family and homes. Pointing to women's magazines, she wrote: "In the magazine image, women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man....In the second half of the twentieth century in America, [a] woman's world was confined to her own body and beauty" (Friedan 1963, 36), marrying a man, and being a mother.

Many feminists in the 1960s and 1970s rejected the ideologies and products of beauty corporations (Baxandall and Gordon 2001), arguing that institutional power denies female power (Brownmiller 1984; Dworkin 1974); in this dynamic, women were situated as passive objects for the male gaze and men were seen as active (de Beauvoir 1949; Mulvey 2001). Since the 1970s, feminists have also authored texts to create public
awareness about women's struggles with beauty as part of a broader effort to promote critical thinking about structural/patriarchal power dynamics. Susie Orbach's pioneering *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978) advocated critiques of media messages about beauty and health, and similar feminist work in the late twentieth century focused on beauty as an ideology produced by institutional power that shapes female subjectivity: Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970); Andrea Dworkin's *Woman Hating: A Radical Look at Sexuality* (1974); Sandra Bartky's *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (1990); Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (1990); Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991), Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993), and Jean Kilbourne's *Deadly Persuasion* (1999; republished in 2000 as *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*).¹

*The Beauty Myth* emerged in the late twentieth century as a quintessential feminist text dedicated to a critique of the beauty industry (e.g., its advertisements, magazines, cosmetics, fashion, television programs, and so forth). Wolf's provocative statements regarding the industry as a site of patriarchal oppression for women drew a hard anti-industry line. She famously asserted, "We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement: the beauty myth" (Wolf 1990, 10). Wolf argued that female beauty is an invisible

¹ Additionally, since the early 2000s, scholars have approached beauty from other angles, especially intersectional and global contexts. This work includes: Janell Hobson's *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (2005), Tiffany Gill's *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (2010), L. Ayu Saraswati's *Seeing Beauty, Sensing Race in Transnational Indonesia* (2013), Blain Roberts' *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South* (2014), and Angela B. McCracken's *The Beauty Trade: Youth, Gender, and Fashion Globalization* (2014). Scholars in sociology (Rebecca Coleman, Mónica Moreno Figueroa, Elizabeth Wissinger, Bonnie Berry, Debra Gimlin, Ashley Mears) and political science (Sheila Jeffreys) have also been exploring the relationship between beauty, women, and society.
patriarchal weapon that feminists have not sufficiently attacked. She cited women’s advancement into the workforce as an area of feminist progress where the beauty myth continues to negatively influence women by weakening their sense of self and thereby stifling their potential for success in the public sphere. Wolf even called for a feminist confrontation with the enemy: "The beauty myth can be defeated for good only through an electric resurgence of the woman-centered political activism of the seventies – a feminist third wave – updated to take on the new issues of the nineties" (1990, 280-281).

This viewpoint aligned with prior feminist views of beauty that considered the ways in which patriarchal power and normative codes of femininity stimulate women to discipline their bodies. Importantly, as noted in *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty*, beauty is situated within a relationship of looking, as "There is no beauty without observation" (Lakoff and Scherr 1984, 30). Importantly, this relationship is gendered, and cultural products (such as art and media) overtly and covertly depict power dynamics in which woman is the passive object and man is the active subject. This interplay has also been recognized in the tradition of Western art, wherein "Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at" (Berger 1972, 45).

Taking this relationship into the realm of media, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey originated the phrase "male gaze" in her 1975 piece, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Utilizing a psychoanalytic framework to investigate the relationship between the notion of spectatorship and gender representation in media texts, she argues that the action of ownership of the gaze is inherently male, and that the female functions as an object of the spectator's desire and gaze. Along these lines, she posits, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and
passive/female.... In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed" (Mulvey 2001, 397). For her, the role of women in media texts, then, is only in relation to, and thus subordinate to, the desires of men.

Mulvey's\(^2\) innovation allows for an understanding of the interplay between media representations of women and audiences. In the early 1990s, Foucauldian feminists Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky extended this conception through their research on how women's identities are shaped through patriarchal social meanings that are imposed on the female body and the ways in which surveillance of the body applies to the pursuit of beauty in contemporary culture. They used philosopher Michel Foucault's theories, particularly his emphasis on the body as a medium through which to understand the micro-politics of power at work in our daily lives, to unpack the construction of female subjectivities. Specifically, they focused on his view of the body as marked by social, economic, and political meanings that sit at the nexus of social (regulation of social practices/policies) and individual (a person’s experiences of her body) control.

Extending Foucault’s conceptualization of philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s work on the panopticon, a prison architecture that allows the person in charge (such as a guard) to view simultaneously the behavior of all prisoners, Bordo and Bartky each proposed that women self-monitor their bodies for an invisible male spectator. For Foucault, social institutions (like the panopticon) obtain power by impressing their ubiquitous nature upon subjects, and it is therefore difficult to identify the origin of power in the larger social context, making individual resistance to it more difficult. Bartky takes this notion further

---

\(^2\) In 1981's "Afterthoughts," Mulvey revised her argument regarding the male gaze by de-emphasizing a fixed gendered dynamic of spectatorship. This ambivalent position opens up possibilities for a fluid notion of female spectatorship that can adopt both female and male identification.
by arguing that the beauty industry has created a culture wherein women constantly feel monitored and assessed by others about their beauty. She states in *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* that women have internalized "a panoptical male connoisseur...[and they] stand permanently before his gaze and under his judgment" (1990, 72) in the attempt to achieve the dominant ideology.

In another extension of Foucault's work on surveillance (i.e., the shaping of subjects as "docile" bodies), Bordo as well as Bartky contend that the interiorization of male authority by women generates a need in them to discipline their bodies. As Bartky articulates this perspective, "The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity on the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular" (1990, 74). Likewise, in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Bordo asserts that late twentieth century Western culture is marked by an intense emphasis on women's pursuit of beauty and, as such, "female bodies become docile bodies - bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, and 'improvement'" (1993, 166). For Bordo, women have absorbed cultural ideologies and have learned how to monitor themselves to a greater or lesser degree. The dominant representations of women (particularly of celebrities and fashion models) present ultra-thin bodies for the approval and pleasure of the "male gaze." This type of female body communicates that girls and women must aspire to have this body in order to be. Bordo contends that women's struggles with body image manifests in a loss of self-esteem; and, on the severe end, women fall victim to the epidemic of sometimes-fatal eating disorders.
Plastic surgery is another area of focus for feminist thought on body discipline. Bordo and Kathy Davis have produced notable work in this area. Stressing the cultural and institutional aspects of cosmetic surgery, Bordo argues that it is a tool of conformity to hegemonic femininity through its positioning as "a burgeoning industry and an increasingly normative cultural practice" (1997, 43); through these contexts, she asserts, plastic surgery produces women's unhappiness with their bodies by defining the female body in ever more flawless terms. Alternately, Davis (1994) focuses on the decisions individuals make to have plastic surgery, contending that they experience an improved sense of self and self-determination by taking control of their bodies/lives through these means. At the root of the disagreement between Bordo and Davis is how each interprets the feminist meaning of empowerment. As Bordo notes: "It seems to me that feminist theory has taken a very strange turn when plastic surgery can be described, as it has been by Kathy Davis, as 'first and foremost...about taking one's life into one's own hands.'...since when has the feminist critique of normalizing beauty practices ever been directed against individuals and their choices?" (1993, 31-32). Their differing opinions also relate to conflicting meanings of agency as resistance against institutional agents (Bordo) versus acceptance of women's positioning within cultural forces and how women talk about their sense of control, value, and pleasure (Davis).

In addition to the above consideration of power dynamics at play in women's views of and behaviors regarding beauty and their bodies, embodiment is a central concept to understanding the politics of women's bodies. For this study, it is important to consider how these politics relate to women's experiences of their bodies and their beauty, paying close attention to the ways in which these experiences intertwine norms of
appearance and behavior. Studying women's experiences of embodiment allows us to "fully understand women's lives, women's position in society, and the possibilities for resistance against that position" (Weitz 2013, 11).

*The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* places the study of the body as "one of the most productive avenues of intervention and analysis for the feminist study of practice of visual culture" (Jones 2002, 371), since paying attention to female embodiment can enhance feminist work "of how visuality contributes to our understanding of who we are as embodied subjects" (Jones 2002, 371). Bordo asserts that by looking at how culture mediates our relationships to and with our bodies, we can understand how our materiality (that is, our "real" bodies as gendered/raced/classed and that have their own histories) "impinges on us – shapes, constrains, and empowers us – both as thinkers and knowers and also as 'practical,' fleshy bodies" (1997, 182).

Embodiment and beauty are central themes for the subjects in this study. Chapter 4 looks at female users' negotiation of subjectivity around embodiment and beauty, wherein I examine the ways in which they engage in discussion about their material bodies. Chapter 3 unpacks three cultural forms that communicate values of beauty that necessitate women's labor on their bodies and attitudes about them. Both chapters highlight the entanglements of feminism and contemporary consumer culture (postfeminism).

Two aspects of theories of embodiment are of particular relevance to this project: first, understanding the everyday experience of women living in their material bodies, and, second, understanding the ways in which these experiences are contextualized within socially constructed discourses that prescribe normative practices and behaviors of femininity. Demonstrating the first account is the work of feminist political scientist Iris
Marion Young, who addressed how women's experiences of pregnancy and menstruation (among others) lead women to sharing "distinctive feelings and modalities of being in-the-world that these aspects of embodiment produce" (2005, 6). In these ways, embodiment is specific to the individual (i.e. a woman's experience of her own body) as well as universal to all women. For Young, conceptualizing embodiment involves recognizing a split between the notions of female and feminine. In this dualism, "female" references the experience of being a woman that, based on certain biological experiences, is different than that of men, while "feminine" references how women are "hostage to hegemonic discourses" that communicate "normatively disciplined expectations" (Young 2005, 6). Studying embodiment along these lines involves understanding the "implications for the sense of agency and power of persons who inhabit these body modalities" (Young 2005, 6). Additionally, the second account of embodiment is illustrated by Simone de Beauvoir's work from the 1940s; in The Second Sex, she queried, "What is a woman?," and, in so doing, stressed the complex experience of women, their bodies, and subjectivity, as "to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world" (1949, 39). These two aspects elucidate the tension between women's lived experiences of their bodies and "the cultural meanings inscribed on the female body that always mediate those experiences" (Conboy, Medina, and Stansbury 1997, 1).

---

3 Feminist theorists on embodiment (such as sociologist Judith Lorber [1995]), have further considered the relationship between biology and ideology, identifying the body as a point of contention in discussing sexual difference. The topic of sexual difference has been discussed at length in feminist literature. For example, see Rosi Braidotti's Nomadic Subjects (1994), Elizabeth Grosz's Volatile Bodies (1994), Butler's Gender Trouble (1990), and Spivak's In Other Worlds (1987). Another perspective of the body is that of the performative body; for literature on this, see Judith Butler's Gender Trouble (1989).
Recent scholarship has also considered women's experiences of embodiment in digital culture, particularly as related to gender and sexuality. Work on pro-eating disorder communities has suggested that women's online participation "enable[s] them to transform their embodied selves, not escape embodiment....[they] deploy Internet technologies that include text and images in order to control their bodies in ways that are both disturbing for others and deeply meaningful for them" (Daniels 2009, 118). Additionally, scholarship has highlighted how normative notions of sexuality as situated in a binary gender system of male/female are reinforced in online expressions of embodiment as "the reiteration of a 'natural' connection between gender and sexed bodies" (van Doorn, Wyatt, and van Zoonen 2008, 371). These studies therefore suggest that values and experiences of gender and sexuality as they relate to the material body are reinforced in ways that support offline norms.

Online feminism has also been a recent topic of feminist scholars. At the turn of the twentieth-century, scholars analyzing online exchanges presented them as a "libertarian utopia of disembodiment" (Daniels 2009, 112) that allowed women to playfully negotiate their identities as separate from their material (gendered and raced) bodies. Feminist scholars such as Faith Wilding (1998) "celebrate[d] the potential of a new wave of feminist practices that engage with Internet technologies in ways that chart new ground for women" (Daniels 2009, 112). Other feminist scholars, such as Anna Everett (2004) were more cautious about the overwhelmingly positive potential of media technology for women and bodies and for cyberfeminism - that is, the practice of feminism performed in the online context (Wilding 1998) - more broadly. Meanwhile, the collection, *Cyberfeminism 2.0* questions what constitutes meanings and practices of
cyberfeminism in the early twenty-first century by investigating "women's participation and voice, which inform how 'the new promising way of thinking and practice' online can be connected to existing feminist politics" (Gajjala and Oh 2012, 8).

Additional recent work on online feminism looks at intimacy and vulnerability. In 2007's "The Vulnerable Video Blogger: Promoting Social Change Through Intimacy," critical studies scholar Patricia Lange proposes that vulnerability occurs when individuals take the risk of revealing their feelings and experiences to others online. This sort of risk also means that individuals open themselves to being criticized and/or heckled by non-members who found the community and post responses to members' videos. Lange contends that "shared intimacies may translate into larger spheres of social action and political participation" (2007, 5), offering potential for feminist thought and practice online. This study queries women's expressions and understandings of feminism and beauty as located within postfeminist media culture.

Postfeminist Self-Branding and Immaterial/Affective Labor

The section provides a theoretical backdrop for this study by exploring how cultural figures and female users engage in immaterial/affective labor on their bodies and attitudes as part of their processes of postfeminist self-branding. This study examines how two cultural products of postfeminism (Tyra Banks' America's Next Top Model and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty) express meanings and practices of beauty that work in association with communication of "choice" and "empowerment" as part of their postfeminist self-brands; how a cultural figure (Kate Moss) signals the ambivalences of postfeminist values of femininity as part of her postfeminist self-brand; and how female users' interpretations of their bodies and the meanings of beauty that they express in
relation to them offers insight into how women who have grown up in contemporary media culture present a post-adolescent negotiation of postfeminism via their own postfeminist self-brands.

Branding is a complicated site for understanding the formation of subjectivity. When brands originated in the late nineteenth century, they were labels that identified the manufacturer or distributor responsible for the product's quality (Strasser 2004). In the 1990s, marketers developed new techniques to trademark corporate identity in order to break through media clutter. In this strategic form of branding, marketers create "a '360-degree world' in which the consumer is 'constantly bombarded'" (Schor 2005, 75) by their messages. Techniques of persuasion situate corporate brands as a seamless part of individuals' everyday lives; they are perpetuated in diverse spaces including television, radio, movies, direct marketing, events, sponsorships, the Internet, product placements, billboards, posters, point-of-purchase displays, product packaging, logos, and social networking sites. Brand development includes marketing campaigns accompanied by public relations efforts to place stories about products in the news as well as to create tie-ins with retailers, schools, or fast food settings.

The ubiquity of brands raises questions about "whether advertisers have any legitimate right to invade every nook and cranny of our mental and physical environment: it has become about the disappearance of space and the lack of meaningful choice" (Klein 2002, 291). More than just marketing techniques, branding is also a "social, economic, and existential reality" (Arvidsson 2006, 14). In *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*, Adam Arvidsson argues that brands "become valuable through their ability to manage and program human communication and appropriate the ethical surplus -- the
common-- that it produces as a sort of value" (2006, 13). So, when people purchase a brand based on the corporate identity that has been attached to it, human socialization occurs through a common association with the brand (i.e., two people who purchase Cover Girl cosmetics may bond in person or in online communities based on this mutual consumption and presumed shared identity). Their socialization, then, is mediated through the brand's role in their lives, and their attachment to the brand serves to secure its place in culture and in people's social networks. As such, branding enlists audiences to support an image that is managed by the company to produce a desired outcome of attachment. Corporate communication about a brand and the consumers' interaction with it involves exchanges of emotion as well as goods (Lury 2011, 152), and current "consumer culture provides a specific context for the development of novel relationships between self-identity and group membership . . . this context is interpreted, reflexively, in various ways by different social groups" (Lury 2011, 215).

It is important to consider the practice of self-branding when analyzing women's engagement with media messages about beauty in contemporary culture. While media studies scholars previously examined textual signs (for instance, via a semiotic approach), it is useful to study as well the influence of a branded culture in leading individuals to engage in self-branding, wherein individuals take the codes and values of consumer culture as part of their self-construction. In so doing, the audience-as-sign sits at the nexus of consumed media messages and social interactions. Building on the consumer culture model of people constructing their lives within the context of a brand (for instance, "I'm a Cover Girl!"), self-branding for the subjects in this project involves sharing an identity with others around a value for beauty; that is, meanings and practices
that align with a distinct attitude about bodies. I consider how cultural figures present self-branding around beauty as a norm (Chapter 3) and then how it is taken up and/or transformed by users (Chapter 4).

Media scholar Alison Hearn argues that self-branding involves neoliberal work on the self and characterizes self-branding as "involv[ing] the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narratives and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries" (2008b, 198). Importantly, she claims that self-branding, as it occurs in reality television and digital culture, is situated within modes of self-regulation and self-improvement to overcome insecurity. Hearn's view that social media has allowed for neoliberal values to penetrate our understandings of ourselves as well as our relations with other people is supported by other scholarship on self-branding (Marwick 2013). Self-branding can also serve as a strategy to achieve micro-celebrity status online, which is a pathway to privilege: specifically, economic and cultural power. Using digital media technology is one way that people can make themselves visible to audiences beyond their immediate geographical community. Media scholar Theresa Senft looks at how camgirls engage in cultivation of micro-celebrity, which she defines as "a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social network sites" (2008, 25). Such self-construction online overlaps with the same consumer culture strategies that are implemented to promote mainstream celebrities.

Of importance to this study is work that specifically examines postfeminist self-branding. In her study of girls' online participation, media studies scholar Sarah Banet-
Weiser asserts that postfeminist self-branding denotes the formation of subjectivity through individuals' use of the visual codes of consumer culture. She sees this sort of self-branding as reframing the ways in which women's bodies are objectified as part of "a new social arrangement that relies on different strategies for identity construction and hinges on more progressive ideals such as capability, empowerment, and imagination" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 69-70). She further posits that accomplishing proficiency in this practice "is expressive of a definition of empowerment" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 79) that exists in contemporary media culture. Banet-Weiser stresses that self-promotion and emotional self-disclosure are integral to girls' formation of self-brands, as is users' feedback on their self-presentations. For her, postfeminist self-branding signals a change for women in terms of approaches to the self, as those "who have mastered the skills of properly caring for the self, or building successful self-brands, are those who are the most socially and culturally valuable...This is a shift from previous moments in feminism, where part of 'taking care of the self' was political action that challenged patriarchal and misogynist culture" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 86). Postfeminist self-branding, as it occurs online, suggests a complicated relationship with feminist values.

This study looks at how the values of beauty held by members of online communities struggling with their bodies (fat acceptance, wannarexic, weight loss surgery) relate to the formation of contemporary female selves within postfeminist media culture. It also studies postfeminist self-branding as it occurs through women's celebrity and brand images that circulate in contemporary culture. I take Gill's definition of subjectivity -- again, "how the social or cultural 'gets inside,' and transforms and reshapes our relationships to ourselves and others" (2008a, 433) -- to offer an understanding of
how gendered subjectivity is formed in contemporary culture around beauty, especially via the practice of postfeminist self-branding. This project thus highlights the tension around ambivalent audiences in postfeminist media culture by engaging both Gill's perspective that considers the social restrictions placed on women as well as Banet-Weiser's view of women's conflicted experiences of agency. Considering immaterial/affective labor, discussed next, and the ways in which it underscores self-branding by women around understandings of beauty in a postfeminist media culture is central to this project.

Key to an examination of the practice of postfeminist self-branding is immaterial and affective labor. Sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato views labor in late capitalism as conceptual work (as opposed to manual or physical labor) that involves the materialization of ideas. As such, immaterial labor is generally unpaid and takes place in "activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (Lazzarato n.d.). Central to immaterial labor is social communication, which produces subjectivity. Consumer culture and digital culture are viewed as spaces in which the immaterial labor of users gives form to their community's understandings of beauty. In particular, I unpack subjects' affective labor in relation to their meanings and practices about beauty. Political philosophers Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt discuss affective labor as a form of immaterial labor that produces affect in the form of bodily capacities or vitality. Affective labor manipulates an individual's "feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 108). Additionally, affective labor has been identified as gendered, as "women's work" (Côté and Pybus 2007, 90); that is, affect/emotion has
been a significant part of women's performance of care-work in the home and in the public sphere. Of particular interest to this project is that these jobs "typically include those that produce services or care through the body" (Côté and Pybus 2007, 90).

The immaterial/affective labor communicated by cultural figures and everyday users is understood within the context of beauty as an economy, as per Wolf's comment that "Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West, it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact" (1990, 180; see more on Wolf and postfeminism in Chapter 3). The work of self-beautification is unpaid and has been considered by Wolf as a "third shift" for women, following paid work (job/career) and domestic/family work. Yet, beauty has the potential for significant value in women's lives: it is conveyed as a source of women's happiness by corresponding with the fulfillment of gender roles, especially regarding the ability to attract a male mate (Bartky 1990). The importance of women working for beauty has been reinforced by cultural attitudes towards their professional advancement; as discussed in Backlash (Faludi 1991), cultural scrutiny of their bodies to assess their adherence to cultural norms of femininity has heightened since the 1960s, when women had increased opportunities to enter social spaces, such as the workplace. This increased emphasis on beauty was regarded by Faludi as a means of redirecting the efforts of women towards their appearance rather than their advancement in the public sphere.

In "The Labor Theory of Beauty," it is argued that an individual's labor in the pursuit of beauty is of value in contemporary Western culture's "postaristocratic environment" (Mao 2003, 224). Since birth (supposedly) no longer determines social
status, it is effort, particularly on one's appearance, that is "the measure by which the self...is 'known' by others" (Mao 2003, 224). The labor/reward relationship that surrounds beauty has been increasingly justified by advances in readily available technologies and techniques (plastic surgery, diet pills, home exercise equipment, and so forth) (Mao 2003). Sociologists Samantha Kwan and Mary Nell Trautner employ the term "beauty work" to describe the "specific appearance and beauty practices performed on oneself" (2009, 50), which include caring for one's hair, makeup, and body shape/size. Working to be beautiful, through a variety of strategies, aligns with the late modern cultural logic, which dictates that "Even if we cannot all be most beautiful, we can all try to look our best" (Mao 2003, 218). In this context, the pursuit of beauty "is more than ever a matter of effort" (Mao 2003, 218), as opposed to something that one "has" innately. Of note, the actual labor that women perform to attain beauty contrasts with media representations that downplay the labor involved in achieving beauty—except as a consumer—and tout the ability of the product to produce the desired results. As Judith Williamson states in *Decoding Advertisements*, "The image of magic in advertisements denies the fact that the product is produced, removing it from its real place in the world and at the same time promising a product from the product. We are allowed to be producers only by being consumers. Thus we can produce by proxy, merely, since we buy the product, and it will then produce the magic result - beauty, love, safety, etc. Our act of buying . . . provides a short cut to a larger action, performed not by us but by the product" (1994, 142).

Beauty work, then, demonstrates a dichotomy between those who put in effort and those who do not. This sort of labor includes shaping the body through diet and exercise, as well as self-ornamentation through fashion and cosmetics. "Lookism," defined as
when "physically attractive people are in fact treated better in many arenas of social life" (Kwan and Trautner 2011, 17), is a cultural measure of the effects of exercising beauty work as a value. Further scholarship details the "beauty bias," that is, the preconceptions and preferential treatment that conventionally appealing people receive over others (for an overview of the literature, see Hatfield 1986; Kwan and Trautner 2009). The notion of beauty work is well situated among studies that correlate professional success with a "normative" feminine appearance. Also referred to as the "beauty premium" (Hamermesh and Biddle 1994), "beautiful" women earn higher incomes (Frieze, Olson, and Russell 1991; Hamermesh and Biddle 1994; Umberson and Hughes 1987). A woman's appearance also factors into the values that are attached to her; a 2011 study found that "women who wear (natural-looking, not too dramatic) makeup are regarded as more capable, likeable and trustworthy -- the perfect employee, in other words" (Malone 2011).

Beauty work appears to be a factor in interpersonal success as well: unattractive women are stigmatized, discriminated against, and treated poorly by others for not embodying the cultural norm (McKinley 1999; Puhl and Brownell 2001; Sobal 2004). Broadly speaking, while beauty work yields rewards, unattractiveness fosters the opposite: punishment.

Based on the above research, engaging in beauty work seems to be an easy choice: do it. However, there is a tension in postfeminism in that beauty practices can be "empowering while simultaneously reinforcing oppressive hegemonic ideals" (Kwan and Trautner 2009, 64). Thus, women who successfully engage in beauty work are able to directly access its benefits, especially in terms of economic and social mobility, while further entrenching norms that some women cannot achieve and for which they thus are continually penalized.
In this project, I study women's postfeminist self-branding around their meanings and practices of beauty by examining their immaterial/affective labor. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which prominent cultural figures engage in postfeminist self-branding, and Chapter 4 articulates how everyday users of technology participate in this practice. In both chapters, I consider the nature of their work on their bodies as well as their emotional communication about this work. Thus, consumer and digital cultures are presented as spaces where cultural figures and users self-brand in relation to values of postfeminism and meanings of beauty through immaterial/affective labor. This work thus contributes to research on postfeminism and beauty, which are topics that have recently been entered into media and cultural studies literature in relation to digital culture, although they have not been studied together (see, for instance, Scott's 2010 article). Meanwhile, beauty has been recently been discussed in digital culture in relation to fashion bloggers who use technology to negotiate their identity via "digital dressing up" (Chittenden 2010) and through "digital self-portraits" (Rocamora 2011), as well as to stimulate activism by advocating for fat fashion as "fashionable resistance" (Connell 2013). In regard to body size and online communities, pro-ana groups have been studied since their emergence over the past decade (see Chapter 4). The study of beauty can also be understood through another lens - that of affect -- which I turn to next.

Affect and Beauty

This section explores women's communication of affect in relation to beauty in contemporary culture. I articulate how users communicate beauty as an affective aesthetic feeling, an expression that indicates the subjective experience of the beautiful as a sense
which goes beyond representation and circulates among individuals. I also locate scholarship on affect in relation to beauty in consumer and digital cultures.

Considering beauty as an affective aesthetic feeling (that is, the experience of the beautiful as a feeling) is an important way that twenty-first century scholars have addressed beauty and the body. In the mid-1990s, many scholars, feeling constrained by the theoretical frameworks of post-structuralism and deconstruction, embraced the "turn in critical theory to affect" (Clough 2007, 1). These theories offered the potential to open up hitherto unexplored dimensions regarding the lived experience of the body. The notion of affect allowed for "a reformulation of bodies as processes rather than entities, and [this approach] invites us to consider not 'What is a body?'...but rather 'What can a body do?'' (Latour as para. by Blackman and Venn 2010, 8-10). Affect, however, is a variable notion, as "there is no single, generalizable theory of affect" (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 3). Nonetheless, looking at subjects' experiences of beauty/the body by way of affect offers a means to go beyond analyses of beauty practices (diet, exercise, cosmetics, fashion, etc.).

Sociologists Rebecca Coleman and Monica Figueroa (2010) offer ideas about beauty and affect that are expanded on for this study. They draw on sociologist Patricia Clough's views of affect and cultural theorist Claire Colebrook's views of aesthetics to develop their conception of beauty as an affective aesthetic feeling. Clough's definition of affect follows in the tradition of philosophers Deleuze, Bergson and Spinoza, and "refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected...[and] is linked to the self-feeling of being alive — that is, aliveness or vitality" (2007, 2). On aesthetics, Colebrook offers a conception of the self and beauty that opens the door for a different turn in feminist
thinking about beauty. She contends that "the experience of the beautiful as feeling can be neither explained away nor reduced to its political uses and abuses" (Colebrook 2006, 134). This viewpoint stresses beauty as based on experience and feeling, rather than simply in relation to gendered and sexist representations. Bridging these two theories, Coleman and Figueroa analyze beauty as an affective aesthetic feeling that communicates one's experience of the beautiful as it references one's body.

Linking together affect, beauty, and hope, Coleman and Figueroa look at beauty as that which is "continually sought out and taken solace in" (2010, 361) by women. Their research draws on cultural theorist Lauren Berlant's (2011) view of "inclination" or "tendency," as the production of something occurring during intense bodily experience that does not yet have formed content but only an inclination. Coleman and Figueroa conceptualize hope as an embodied affect, a "feeling that inclines toward the beautiful (where the content of what is beautiful might not yet be clear) and that provides a sense of being alive" (2010, 361); that is, their female subjects feel hope when they envision their experience of beauty in the future. Their considerations of temporality (e.g., of there being past, present, and future orientations) further illuminate their subjects' experiences.

Moreover, Coleman and Figueroa distinguish hope from optimism via Berlant's theory of cruel optimism, which Berlant describes as

a relation that exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when an object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially. (2011, 2)
Berlant describes cruel optimism as an affect, a relation, a cluster of promises, and an attachment to an object that a person desires and believes will deliver a "good life" but, in fact, does the opposite. While Coleman and Figueroa draw on her theory, they distinguish their view of optimism from hers in their emphasis on the potential of hope; they acknowledge that their subjects' experiences of beauty may indeed be cruel, but that hope seems to offer the subjects a sense that there can be a positive potential for them in relation to beauty in the future. Berlant, by contrast, stresses that a relation, or attachment, to an object can, ultimately, simply be cruel.

Based on the above literature, I examine the affective processes of members of online communities, paying attention to the feelings associated with the beauty of their bodies in different temporalities (past, present, future). In addition to hope and cruel optimism, I explore the circulation of feelings of self-love, which is contextualized in literature later in this chapter and detailed in Chapters 4 and 5. Berlant's time frame for her analysis of cruel optimism is "between the 1990s and the present" (2011, 3), in the context of an emerging neoliberal culture in which, she argues, individuals are struggling to cope with a new world of "dissolving assurances" ("Lauren Berlant" 2012). Notably, this period also relates to the emerging postfeminist, digital culture that frames my study, the time during which my subjects experienced their adolescence and have grown into adulthood. The cultural context, for me, cannot be removed from women's affective experiences and how their feelings play into their roles as both consumers and producers of values of beauty.

Scholars have discussed affect in relation to beauty in consumer culture. Notably, sociologist Mike Featherstone considers the relations between the body, affect, morality,
and transformation in consumer culture. When products sell "a beautiful appearance and thereby a beautiful self" (Featherstone 2010, 195), the implicit promise is positive transformation: the move to a better life, better relationships, and better opportunities. However, that it is not just the appearance of the body that is central to transformation, but also affect. To access "the look" promoted by consumer culture and thereby be transformed, people need to present "a body whose movement and sensory range communicates a positive affective charge" (Featherstone 2010, 196). The goal of the transformative process as advocated by consumer culture is a body that has the power to affect others (in that it has social "force" in spaces of sociability) with "the look" that carries an appropriate affective charge. These affects and their relation to aspirational bodies "invite comparisons" by distinct audiences. Women can transform themselves accordingly and enjoy the "good life," which is "available for purchase" (Featherstone 2010, 200) via the codes of consumer culture; that is, they can present an affective body comprised of external signs of social acceptability alongside an "inner narrative of what one feels one should be" (Featherstone 2010, 198). In this sense, media images of the body promote a fantasy centered on "'The look good, feel good' transformational logic of consumer culture" (Featherstone 2010, 202), suggesting a fortuitous relation between our inner self and external appearance. Studying affect opens up questions about this logic of the good life and can also enrich understanding of the individual as both a part of and separate from this context.

Other scholarship on affect has examined the work of fashion models, especially as related to possession of the "look" that Featherstone speaks of. The affective flow in the work of models has been argued to "produce affective images, by tuning into a felt
sense of vitality, aliveness, or engagement that takes no particular form, but taps into affective energy that is then conveyed via the virtual human contact of the image" (Wissinger 2007, 258). The model’s ability to generate effective affective flows, or energies, is crucial to the performance of her job.

Beauty and affect in consumer and digital cultures is, thus far, a relatively under-researched topic in cultural, media, and feminist studies. Banet-Weiser's work (2012) studies the immaterial/affective labor of girls in the production of YouTube videos, addressing the postfeminist context and the ways in which female users support postfeminist values, but does not focus specifically on beauty and embodied affect. Existing work on the topic of beauty and affect includes: an investigation of the transnational circulation of affect in relation to race, beauty, and gendered subjectivity that "trac[es] the discursive meanings of spatial tropes and the ways in which they are attached to certain emotions and the ways in which they then signify the meanings of 'specific' races of women" (Saraswati 2013, 61-62); a study that places beauty and affective labor in the global and consumer context of sex tourism, interrogating how "beauty operates as affective labor performed by sex workers" (Rivers-Moore 2013, 153) in Costa Rica; and scholarship on fashion blogging and affective labor as located within a neoliberal (but not postfeminist) context that looks at the ways in which fashion-themed blogs produced by Asian Americans and British Asian women resist neoliberal practices (Pham 2011). This project contributes to work on beauty and affect in consumer and digital cultures with a focus on the entanglements of postfeminism and media around beauty.
Methodology for the Study

This study presents a feminist media studies analysis of beauty culture using a multi-method approach that moves across visual, popular, consumer, and digital cultures. It takes into account brands, entrepreneurs, fashion models, celebrities, reality television, and everyday users. In so doing, I provide a contextual analysis of postfeminism and its subjects to examine the production of contemporary subjectivity around beauty. Looking at cultural figures (Kate Moss, Tyra Banks/America's Next Top Model, The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty) as well as users struggling with non-hegemonic bodies (fat acceptance, wannarexic, weight loss surgery) fleshes out the ways in which consumer culture messages of beauty and power, as well as their associated meanings of empowerment, circulate via texts as well as in the communication of women who have grown up in a postfeminist, digital era. This research identifies a meaningful site for scholarship concerned with the contemporary intersections of female subjectivity, postfeminism, self-branding, immaterial and affective labor, affect, and the production and consumption of media messages of beauty. It is crucial to recognize the relevance of postfeminism for unpacking women's subjectivity, wherein "power and ideology operate through the construction of subjects, not through top-down imposition but through negotiation, mediation, resistance and articulation" (Gill 2008a, 439), in relation to beauty norms in contemporary culture. But it is equally important to understand the experiences of everyday women who express conflicts about their bodies in relation to beauty. Studying women's affective communication affords a complementary analysis of experiences with beauty and bodies that moves beyond representation.

This research utilizes multiple qualitative methods and is interpretive and
interdisciplinary in nature, drawing primarily from Media and Cultural Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Sociology, and Philosophy. The methodology for this project entails (a) textual analysis of three current cultural figures that communicate meanings about beauty and female power and (b) online observation, through which I collected data from three online communities regarding users' communication about personal, communal, and cultural values related to beauty and female power. An interpretive framework structures my unpacking of the meanings and practices of beauty and power expressed by cultural figures as well as of everyday digital users.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this project situate it in the context of long-standing works on beauty politics and media but, distinctively, with a focus on illuminating an emerging neoliberal, gendered subjectivity in relation to beauty and affect. The questions are two-pronged:

What are the current entanglements of feminism and media culture around beauty? And how is their configuration communicated to audiences via industries, celebrities, and brands?

What meanings and experiences emerge from the participation of women in digital culture as they navigate consumer culture's intertwined meanings about female beauty and power in new ways? More specifically, what do their digital media practices and expression of values about female beauty/bodies suggest about the formation of contemporary subjectivity in postfeminist media culture? And, in what ways do women's affects (feelings) related to beauty complicate the meanings of this subjectivity?

For the second block of queries, similar to scholar Janice Radway in her work on female consumption of popular texts, I take a "multifocused approach that attempts to do justice to the ways historical subjects understand and partially control their own behavior
in a social and cultural context that has powerful determining effects on individual action" (1991, 6).

Interpretive Analysis

Social theories provide a meaningful way of interpreting media texts and online data about the subjects' communication of values and their digital media practices. They help to reveal cultural figures' meanings about female beauty and power, how women’s participation in digital culture has enabled them to navigate these meanings, and what women's digital media practices and communication of values express about our culture.

In examining the subjects for this study -- that is, the three cultural figures and the members of three online communities -- I applied theories pertaining to neoliberal subjectivities at two levels: postfeminism and self-branding to consider if and how female cultural figures and everyday women engage in the practice of postfeminist self-branding.

Work on postfeminism by Gill aided me in understanding how cultural figures and everyday women communicate messages about beauty and feminism. Additionally, for the users, it allowed me to conceptualize the ways in which women interpret their intertwined meanings. To examine the subjects' relation to postfeminism, I organized the data on their communication about beauty and power using the concept of "postfeminist sensibility" as defined by Gill: "femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; the articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas;...and an emphasis upon consumerism" (2007a, 255).
At the same time, Hearn's theory of self-branding was employed to examine the subjects' communication of neoliberal values in terms of transformation; that is, I explored how women self-branded in order to access a "new-found sense of self" (Hearn 2008a, 500) that seemingly eradicates insecurity. Here, I focused on subjects' communication of values of self-improvement and work on the self in relation to changing their body as well as how they felt about themselves because of said changes. I also considered Banet-Weiser's (2012) view of postfeminist self-branding in relation to the subjects' bodies; that is, whether meanings and self-displays of their bodies were simply about objectification or "part of a new social arrangement" that positions such presentation as empowering. The relation of the resulting self-promotion of the body and beauty values as it relates to narcissism was also explored. To do so, I studied how my subjects promoted their bodies as well as their emotions about their bodies, drawing on Gill's themes of "the shift from objectification to subjectification" and "an emphasis upon consumerism."

Underpinning the above analysis of the subjects' postfeminist self-branding were theories of immaterial/affective labor, which I drew on to examine women's immaterial labor for beauty (e.g., diet, exercise, surgery, cosmetics/fashion) and their emotional communication about it. These theories enabled me to explore how the labor women perform to realize a bodily representation that reflects their understandings of beauty connects with their meanings and practices as well as how these meanings/practices, in turn, relate to their communication about loving their bodies and themselves. In addition to looking at each community individually, I looked across these communities to
understand how women's beauty work corresponds with the production of meanings about beauty as a shared value.

To unpack the transformation of their bodies and emotions, I looked at how the subjects referenced self-esteem as related to three of Gill's themes. To unpack the beauty values of the subjects and their reproduction of consumer culture's values, I considered women's labor on their bodies in relation to "the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline" (which I consider to occur, generally, through the context of "the dominance of a makeover paradigm"), and women's labor on their emotions in relation to "a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment."

Textual Analysis of Cultural Figures: Additional Theories

To provide a snapshot of the contemporary configuration of feminism and media culture, I examine recent consumer culture media texts to illuminate their current renderings of beauty and female power (see Chapter 3). The three sites selected as case studies have generated conversations/images of beauty that have attained power in postfeminist media culture. Cultural power, here, is defined as meeting one or more of the following criteria: long-standing media visibility (approximately a decade in length), industry awards, and viewership. Additionally, they each communicate postfeminist values about beauty that were absorbed and re-expressed by media outlets during the time my online subjects were growing up. This pervasive imagery may potentially serve as a demanding internal blueprint for how my subjects view their own bodies, following Bordo's contention that contemporary culture is characterized by the "power of cultural images over women’s lives" (1993, 457).
The subjects investigated here are fashion models Kate Moss, Tyra Banks, and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, or CFRB. For almost twenty years, Moss has been a fixture on the global fashion scene. During this time, she was named among *Time* magazine’s 100 most influential people (2007), was second on Forbes’ top-earning list for models (2012), and won numerous fashion industry awards (the CDFA Fashion Influence Award, the British Fashion Award, and the Shockwave NME Award for Sexiest Woman). Fellow model Banks has similarly been a noticeable part of the beauty industry since the 1990s, first as a model and more recently as a businesswoman. She broke barriers as the first African-American model to be on the celebrated *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition and was on *Time* magazine’s 100 Heroes and Pioneers list (2007). Her reality show *America’s Next Top Model* has had consistent viewership for over a decade, and she has won industry awards for it (two Teen Choice Awards), for her now-defunct talk show (two Daytime Emmys), and for being a media professional who advocates for the LGBTQ community (GLAAD Excellence in Media Award). In addition, she has accrued personal financial rewards, making Forbes' Top Earning Celebrity 100 list from 2006-2008. Finally, the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty has been promoting messages of self-esteem regarding female beauty in popular culture for the past nine years (2004-present); it has received numerous awards (such as the Silver Anvil Award) and monetarily benefitted Unilever, Dove's parent company.

A feminist political economy perspective is applied to all three case studies. This approach considers how power structures influence the processes of (self)commodification of women's bodies, emotions, and ideas. Ellen Riordan states that it is the responsibility of feminist political economists to "rigorously challenge both
production and consumption practices detrimental to women, which these [media] industries set in place" (Riordan 2001, 8). This effort is particularly concerned with "how patriarchy and capitalism continually reproduce social injustices that must be eliminated" (Riordan 2001, 5). Additional theories have been applied to each case study, as follows.

For Kate Moss and "Rexy," I provide a visual culture analysis of artist Marc Quinn’s representations of Moss, as they achieved international media attention for being part of an exhibition at The British Museum. Moss can be read as a figure whose image and body carry cultural significance for women who consume her; as visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff states, "Visual culture does not depend on imagery but on this modern tendency to picture or visualize existence" (1999, 6). I employ McRobbie's (2008) notion of "postfeminist disorder" to examine the significance of Moss' visual imagery as speaking to the cultural conflicts that surround the pursuit and embodiment of femininity in our contemporary epoch. This theory aids in understanding how, as a version "unhealthy femininity," Moss becomes a poster girl of postfeminist disorder by signifying conditions such as eating disorders and drug abuse, while at the same time presenting a heterosexual and sexualized body that fetishizes and constrains female power (Negra 2008). This notion helps me to explore how Moss' aesthetic and celebrity status around "rexy" (a descriptor of Moss' image combining anorexic and sexy) underline her self-brand.

In the case of Tyra Banks/ANTM and "Fierce," I offer a genre analysis of reality television to examine America’s Next Top Model (ANTM). It is important to consider the nature of this genre since it has been characterized by media studies scholars Laurie Ouellette and James Hay as a "cultural technology...of advanced or 'neo' liberal
citizenship" (2008, 14) that educates and guides the daily life of individuals. In this context, women present themselves as self-motivated subjects responsible for their own fates, ready and willing to engage in unending work on the self. In particular, ANTM focuses on body work and consumerism to facilitate the development of “self-monitoring citizens” (Sender 2012, 141). The message that “the ‘better you’ can only be achieved through the makeover” (Weber 2009, 7) locates it as a particular version of reality television program that combines a “make over” show with a "job game" (Ouellette and Hay 2008, 132) in that young women seek to win the moniker "America's Next Top Model." As such, the program situates itself as a site for the preparation of working models, and, each season, one winning contestant is promised fulfillment of this dream. I investigate the ways in which ANTM contestants strive to achieve "fierce," a term that originated in the LGBTQ community as an aspirational self-descriptor and has been used in the show since its inception in reference to the labor of contestants on their bodies and emotions. To understand how women’s labor produces meanings of fierce as a postfeminist self-brand, I juxtapose Bartky’s (1990) delineation of disciplinary practices that produce docile bodies alongside Gill’s (2007a) breakdown of postfeminist tenets. This research covers sixteen seasons of ANTM over 8 years, as the format, in terms of judges, gender of contestants, and narrative structure, remained consistent during that time. These seasons were integral in building and managing the Banks brand for nearly a decade.

To analyze images from the print launch of Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB), as well as its viral video, I employed semiotics, as it is a useful approach for teasing out denotative and connotative meanings in media texts. Interrogating signs’
oppositional relations is central to examinations of ideological meaning and power (Judith Williamson 1994), and illuminating differences in meaning leads to an understanding about the unfamiliar by comparing it with the familiar. The semiotic analysis presented here decodes the ways in which CFRB's signs about "real beauty" communicate meanings of liberation and oppression. It unpacks CFRB's print texts via their language, logos, and positioning of bodies, thereby linking connotative chains of meaning that exploit similarity and difference (Danesi 2002). To analyze CFRB’s viral video, which bears similarity to the codes and conventions of television, media scholar John Fiske's (2000) work is especially helpful. His analytical categories include camera work, lighting, editing, music, casting, setting, costume, make-up, and action. These aspects of the campaign are all crucial in unpacking the concept of "Real beauty,” a term marketed by Dove and associated with self-esteem.

The above case studies provide a snapshot of how the current production and dissemination of meanings about beauty communicate postfeminism and self-branding based on one's appearance. This research constructs the cultural landscape about beauty values in postfeminist media and provides a context for my study about how women negotiate and understand consumer culture messages related to beauty and power. The values of beauty promoted by these sites of inquiry are relevant to understanding the relationship of cultural figures in postfeminist media culture and the meanings of beauty expressed by my subjects in their online communities.

Analysis of Online Communities: Method and Additional Theories

The direct testimony of women’s voices provides immediacy about how female audiences experience and interpret ideologies of beauty and feminism. Online
observation offers a valuable mode of data collection as it allows the researcher to draw out a description of, the common practices in, and knowledge about the participants in these communities. For this researcher, online communities "are not based on proximity…but on shared interests" (Smyres 1999), and are situated within a definition of community offered by sociologist George Hillery Jr: "(1) a group of people (2) who share social interaction (3) and some common ties between themselves and the other members of the group (4) and who share an area for at least some of the time" (as per Hamman 1997). Communications scholar Nancy Baym similarly contends that the term "online community" can be a way to describe members who share a "sense of space, shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal relationship" (2010, 75).

I collected data through a "completely unobtrusive observation" (Garcia et al. 2009, 58). As there was no interaction between the subjects and myself, I did not reveal my identity as a researcher to them. An important consideration contributing to this decision involved an assessment of how to best study the nature of the politics of beauty (see Introduction), wherein women may interpret their appearance through the eyes of others and, in turn, self-objectify or self-censor. The degree of the self-regulation could intensify due to the sensitive and intimate topics at hand: bodies and beauty. Direct observation online thus appeared to offer a research approach that did not involve the conscious imposition of additional eyes, albeit those of a researcher, for the subjects. During this process, I remained aware that cultural memories deriving from my own experience and knowledge of feminist history have shaped my interpretations of female resistance/conformity in relation to beauty. The methodological details for this study are
described under three headings: (1) Selection of Subjects, Communities, and Sites, (2) Data Collection, and (3) Theories.

*Selection of Subjects, Communities, and Sites*

Based on the research questions above, three online communities were selected for this study: fat acceptance, wannarexic/pro-ana (anorexic), and weight loss surgery patients. All communities met the same criteria: they were formed around responses to beauty, all their members are women, they are assembled communities in digital culture, and their members have consistently employed digital practices to negotiate beauty. (When possible, I focused my analysis towards subjects who were integral in positioning the channel's messages and also provided the majority of their community's videos/posts).

The subjects in these groups also suited the desired demographics for the study: they were adolescents during and after the 1990s (when postfeminist media culture emerged), and part of the Net Generation (also called the Y Generation or Millennial Generation), which refers to those born between approximately 1980 and 2000 and for whom "Social media is at the heart of a culture...[of this] grown-digital generation who, in profound and fundamental ways, learn, work, play, communicate, shop, and create communities very differently from their parents" (Leung 2013, 998).

As they have gone through their adolescent phase in this cultural context, my subjects offer insight into a having negotiated postfeminism during and after their adolescence. At the time that they wrote their blogs/vlogs, they ranged in age from their late teens to their early 30s. Additionally, women's participation on these sites focuses on the production and self-display of the body, and they express meanings of beauty in relation to work on their bodies and their aesthetic values. Finally, the communities were
chosen because of their capacity to address my research questions since the primary purpose of the women in these groups was to discuss beauty and the female body. I anticipated that their conversations would provide insight into the ways in which contemporary young women interpret the feminist adage of "the personal is political;" that is, I hoped to unpack how their meanings of female beauty and power related to an understanding of cultural norms about these issues, because each group was focused on appearance. I also sought to understand the ways in which the digital media practices in which they engaged related to their communication of both individual and group beauty philosophies.

Broadly, each group - fat acceptance, wannarexic, and weight loss surgery patients - has an acknowledged population that participates. At its inception, the fat acceptance movement was characterized as "highly gendered, with a majority female membership" (Sobal 1999, 242), who are mainly Caucasian and middle-class (Sobal 1999, 243). For many decades, anorexics have been characterized as "Young, White, heterosexual, middle-class college women" (Lorber and Moore 2006, 105). Wannarexia is associated predominantly with young women in their teens and early twenties (Henry 2007). Finally, the most recent socioeconomic analysis of weight loss surgery patients shows that the percentage of people who have it are disproportionately white women with health insurance: "the vast majority of the 88,000 people with morbid obesity who had bariatric surgery...were female (81 percent), white (75 percent), fell into higher household

---

4 As per my correspondence with Dr. Angela Mensah, the past and present fat acceptance movement seems to have been and be relatively homogeneous (that is, largely Caucasian) in terms of racial/ethnic composition. As Sobal notes, this may be correlated with "minority groups more positively valu[ing] larger bodies" at the outset of the movement (1999, 243).
income categories (80 percent) and had private health insurance (82 percent)” (Taylor and Muscara-Finnerty 2009). And while 18 percent of the morbidly obese population is African American, only 11 percent of all bariatric surgery patients are African American (Taylor and Muscara-Finnerty 2009). This racial disparity was attributed to factors such as low income and lack of medical coverage. Eligibility for weight loss surgery is assessed pre-operatively based on having a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 40 (or a BMI between 35 and 40 with an obesity-related disease like Type II diabetes) and having demonstrated prior efforts to lose weight.

In total, this study investigated 25 subjects: 6 in the fat acceptance group, 9 in the wannarexic group, and 10 in the weight loss surgery group. To gain an in-depth understanding of each group, I aimed to study approximately the same number of subjects per group. Due to the structure of the fat acceptance group, however, it became clear that only 6 subjects communicated regularly about the construction of their aesthetic values, values that were important to an understanding of the group as a whole. At the outset of each observation, I was tracking 10 subjects in the wannarexic and weight loss surgery groups. Over the course of the observation, however, one subject in the former group stopped participating in the community. All 10 subjects were retained in the weight loss surgery group.

The subjects were identified through snowball sampling, a nonprobability sample that also afforded for their observation through "shared cultural codes...[as they are] connected by some activity, behavior, or identification" (Pitts-Taylor 2007, 13). Through this method, subjects were found through their online interactions, which developed solely through vlogging for the fat acceptance and through blogging for the wannarexic
group. For the weight loss surgery group, subjects' interactions stemmed from both vlogging and meeting offline, which then translated into online participation.

None of the vlogging communities required membership in order to observe them. The livejournal community itself did not require membership, but entry to livejournal did, and so I provided my Rutgers email address. The vloggers in two of the communities in this study (fat acceptance and weight loss surgery patients) provided their identities through verbal self-descriptions that included their names (always their first name, and most times their last name). Their names were also included in their profiles and oftentimes in the descriptions of their vlogs. The members of the pro-ana community, however, sought to keep their identities concealed by using their handles exclusively and not providing their real names in their profiles; they did, however, provide their geographical location and age. Likewise, I could visually see the personal characteristics of gender and race for the vloggers, but not for the bloggers (although several of them did post photographs that they identified as representing themselves). I was not able to verify such demographic information with the participants as a nonparticipant observer. However, it has been noted even with participant observation that in the online space, verification of facts is difficult, and deception can occur (Turkle 1997). In view of this and since this study is interested in women's self-construction online, I accepted the self-identification provided by the women when examining their communication.

Exploratory research revealed that the online communities for fat acceptance and weight loss surgery patients congregate on YouTube. YouTube provides an ongoing visual of the body that is being described in the narratives of the women in these two groups. Vloggers in these groups were useful for this research in that they used
technology to document their process of body transformation in a manner akin to a visual diary or report. As well, YouTube has been identified as a medium for postfeminist self-branding by Banet-Weiser (2012). To locate the sites on which this study would take place, I identified the most trafficked and most popular channels by performing keyword searches for "fat acceptance" for the first group and "weight loss surgery" and "bariatric surgery" for the second group in the YouTube.com search bar. Vloggers in these communities were selected for analysis based on the popularity of their subscription status within this channel, the frequency of their posting, and the number of feedback comments they received from other users in the communities.

For the fat acceptance and weight loss surgery sites, the communities seem to have coalesced spontaneously. For the fat acceptance group, women sought out others who no longer desired a sense of unhappiness with their bodies. For the weight loss surgery group, women who had or were anticipating surgery sought out other individuals with whom to share their weight loss journeys; additionally, they wanted to make the videos for themselves to express their WLS experiences. The women in the weight loss surgery community who were selected for this study vlogged consistently throughout their weight loss journeys from the pre-op or immediate post-surgery stage through the time they met/came close to (within 15 pounds of) their goal weight. They also reported feeling connected to the group (i.e., were inspired by other members and/or attracted/recruited new members) and provided many of the videos that comprise the community.

Developed in 2005, YouTube had grown massively as a video-sharing service when the research for this project commenced in 2011; that year, it "ranked as the top
online video content property...with 142.7 million unique viewers." From 2010-2011, its global daily views increased by 50 percent, which meant that they "handle[d] a whopping 3 billion views per day" (Wauters 2014). At the time that research began for my dissertation proposal in 2009, YouTube was heralded by social media new site Mashable as "the Top Social Media Innovation of the Decade" (Ostrow 2009).

Since two of my three research communities are vloggers on YouTube, I felt that it was important to contextualize their communication as it distinctly relates to vlogging and intimacy. YouTube is a social networking site in which the vlogs' "emphasis [is] on liveness, immediacy and conversation" (Burgess and Green 2009, 54), and, as such, the nature of the viewing experience "reminds us of the residual character of interpersonal face-to-face communication" (Burgess and Green 2009, 54). This line of exploration was further pursued because the webcam, central to the creation of YouTube texts, has been identified as "form[ing] a particular aesthetic...[by] locat[ing] the viewer as a virtual participant and thus...a sense of closeness in relation to the viewer, a pure visualized one-to-one relation" (Hirdman 2010, 6). Moreover, as Lange proposes, YouTube is a space where there are "'videos of affiliation'" (2009, 71), which refers to videos that "attempt to maintain feelings of connection with potential others who identify...as intended viewers of the video...[and are] useful objects of study because they inform explorations of how social networks are negotiated through video" (2009, 71).

Exploratory research revealed that pro-anas/wannarexics in the desired age group use blogging (rather than vlogging) as the prevalent social media practice and that livejournal.com is an active site for pro-ana (i.e., pro-anorexia) blogs. As with the other two communities, the researcher identified the most trafficked and most popular channels
using a keyword search. The terms for "pro-ana" on livejournal.com's search function states, "Find people and communities interested in ___." An early blogging community set up as an "online journaling" site that was comprised of "mostly female users" (Marwick 2013, 46), Livejournal has been a space for pro-ana communities for almost a decade; and this community has been before studied on this social networking site by scholars (for instance, Haas et al. 2011). Livejournal has been "a high volume site with an incredible amount of pro-ana discussion; the medium was particularly well-suited to straddle the line between highly personal accounts and the anonymous ethos of the message board" (Storozynsky 2012). Moreover, unlike Facebook, Livejournal has not vigorously tried to delete the pro-ana activity. It has been noted that some pro-ana individuals have shifted to more image-based social media sites such as Pinterest, where they "rel[y] more on the trafficking of images and catchphrases than explicit conversation. Friendships and alliances are formed secondarily, as a result of these shared interests" (Storozynsky 2012). Since this project focuses on looking at self-expressions and relations of meanings of beauty and power, Livejournal offered a site for user activity along these lines.

Like YouTube, Livejournal is a space for intimate online relations. Digital media scholar Katie Davis has identified it as a space for "reciprocal self-disclosure" (2012, 48) due to its commenting system, wherein users provide feedback to one another's posts; moreover, "the spatial and temporal distance from their audience makes self-disclosure feel less threatening" (Davis 2012, 48). The blogging structure of Livejournal, in addition, allows for unrestricted length of posts (in comparison to, for instance, the character length imposed by Twitter or Facebook). According to Davis, by participating
on LiveJournal, female users “are able to express thoughts and feelings that they rarely have the opportunity to express in other contexts” (2012, 49).

The communication of pro-anas is distinctly different from that of wannarexics on pro-ana sites. Self-identified anorexics share stories about their doctor's visits, their experiences of being diagnosed with anorexia, and narratives about their bodies which indicate that they are underweight; in addition, they currently or previously have weighed around 100 pounds or less. Wannarexics created another narrative, in which they described themselves as having disordered eating and expressed a desire to be anorexic. These women detailed their struggles to lose weight in line with being a failed dieter, unlike the self-identified anorexics who saw their power in being master dieters. Finally, the weight range of the wannarexics tended to be 140+ pounds when joining the site, while the anorexics' weights were substantially lower. The narratives of the wannarexics promised to be more revealing for my research on the meanings of beauty in postfeminist media culture than that of the anorexics, given that they indicate consumption of cultural meanings about thin privilege: they discuss their aspirations to be anorexic, their attempts to emulate specific anorexic practices, and their experiences of failure in attaining the anorexic appearance. Importantly, they label themselves as "ana," suggesting an identification with this group. On the pro-ana site, they are called wannarexics.

Sociologists Natalie Boero and C.J. Pascoe distinguish wannarexics from anorexics on pro-ana sites based on important ana rituals – namely, "posting pictures, check-ins (statistics and food reports) and group activities (fasts and surveys)" (2012, 42). Proving their "authenticity," anorexics post images of their emaciated bodies; describe in excruciating detail their diets and exercise programs, BMI, measurements, and length of
time of being anorexic – information that is constantly questioned by community members; and participate in group activities that, through constant interaction, are assessed by members for dedication to their ana goals. To select a group of wannarexics for this study, I followed the rubric set forth by Boero and Pascoe (2012) and, accordingly, I utilized these observations as criteria to differentiate wannarexics from anorexics on the site of analysis and refer to individuals as "wannarexics" in this study based on these criteria. They participate in ana rituals such as the aforementioned check-ins and group activities, but the majority of the time, do not follow through with them. Instead, they express a desire to labor like anorexics who uphold strict diet/exercise plans. I add to Boero and Pascoe's work by locating these individuals within postfeminist media culture and the practice of postfeminist self-branding. Additional descriptions of wannarexics are discussed in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

This research took place online through an immersive direct observation of women living their lives as members of groups whose communication is primarily about values involving beauty. The observational period for the aforementioned three communities began immediately after receiving approval from Rutgers' Institutional Review Board (IRB), which occurred on August 2, 2011.

The material for this study included blogs (a website or webpage where a person routinely expresses her views) and vlogs (a blog in a video format) produced by the women in the online communities under study. I examined approximately 600 distinct videos (ranging from 2 minutes to 26 minutes each) across both the fat acceptance and weight loss surgery groups, and also read an estimated 200 unique blogs in the pro-
ana/wannarexic group. Watching the vlogs or reading the blogs took place over discrete
time periods for each group (totaling approximately 7 months per group) for one to five
hours a day.

While observing the groups, I took extensive field notes in order to "record their
[subjects'] reactions and subjective experiences" (Garcia et al. 2009, 65). These notes
describe the groups under study using carefully recorded field notes, which included
taking detailed observations and direct quotes, selecting key members who hold
knowledge of the group as representatives of that group, supplementing this raw data
with other forms of documentation (e.g., photos), and setting aside interpretation and
judgment while recording and synthesizing the data. The notes comprised both hand-
written descriptions of verbal and textual patterns (for instance, the repetitive use of
certain words or wearing specific types of clothing) and direct quotes (copied and pasted
from blogs or transcribed from vlogs) that were recorded using the software program
Word, which remained open during the observations. In addition, I took screen grabs of
images posted by the wannarexics as aspirational messages as well as of images that they
uploaded and designated as themselves. I also took screen grabs to illustrate the self-
presentation of members of the fat acceptance group and to show transformation of the
appearance of members of the weight loss surgery group.

The data was collected at two levels for each community: (a) their social
environment and media practices within that environment, and (b) their use of visual and
textual techniques as well as sound and movement.

As defined by Guimarães, the online social environment is "a symbolic space
created in cyberspace…[that] allow[s for] communication between two or more users"
The environment is characterized by the spaces that the members use (blogs, vlogs, and social networking sites), their frequency of use (daily, weekly posts), and the times of their posts (nighttime, morning). My subjects' digital media practices took place within this environment and illuminate how the women "communicate, present oneself, and interpret others' presentation of self in a technologically mediated interactional environment" (Garcia et al. 2009, 78). As described by media scholar Nick Couldry, media practices refer to: "what are people (individuals, groups, institutions) doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts? How is people's media-related practice related, in turn, to their wider agency?" (2012, 37).

Specifically, media practices include a person's daily habits (for instance, the frequency of a person’s participation on a certain website), the "social constructions that carry with them a whole world of capacities, constraints, and power" (Couldry 2012, 33), the person's "human needs" (Couldry 2012, 34), and the relationship between practices and themes of "coordination, interaction, community, trust and freedom" (Couldry 2012, 34). This study of digital media practices investigates women's media practices and how they relate to their values of beauty and power in the online environment.

Through the process discussed above, patterns began to emerge in the subjects' textual, visual, aural, and movement communication that appeared to relate to the "implicit practices, member hierarchies, relationship structures and tacit knowledge" (Skageby 2011, 416). Textual data online has been defined as "various techniques to convey physicality, emotion and feeling: colloquial vernacular (an indication of locality), the selection of specific words which expressed subtly in feeling" (Garcia et al. 2009, 61) as well as the use of quotes or lyrics in their profiles or vlog/blog descriptions (especially
quotes from films and/or songs), or links to other sites. Visual data refers to "verbal messages in conjunction with their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, along with the impression given by their appearance, clothing, and setting...[additional] visual data [includes] (e.g., the use of pictures, colors, page layout, and graphic design of Web sites)" (Garcia et al. 2009, 62). Sound refers to aural and other non-silent communication, such as music playing in the background of vloggers' videos, while movement refers to moving graphics or embedded videos (both of which occurred more frequently on blogs) or the movement of the body (which occurred in the vlogs).

Following the guidelines of Garcia et al., I collected data that "provide[d] enhanced resources for the presentation of self...in online environments" (2009, 64). In addition to the aforementioned sources, this data collection included an interrogation of the visual material provided by users themselves (thereby allowing access to material that conveys those aspects of the users' personas that they want others to see). It also examined users' direct voice communication as this "provides data which more closely mirrors conversations in face-to-face settings" (Garcia et al. 2009, 64). Through these procedures, data was collected on the tone and content of the interactions as well as shifts in community power dynamics (for instance, how members facilitate the community's philosophy of beauty).

Additional Theories

This project looks at the phenomenon of postfeminist media culture, and, specifically, how women produce and consume meanings, practices, and feelings of beauty in this cultural context. As interpretive research that uses critical theory, it follows the definition for interpretive studies as that which "assume[s] that people create and
associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them” (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991, 25). Analysis of the data regarding the subjects' meanings and practices of beauty and female power and their affective communication, as evidenced through their postfeminist meanings and practices and production of affect, indicated a phenomenon that cut across the members of the groups. This phenomenon, which I term self-love subjectivity, is offered as a set of neoliberal meanings and practices, as well as an affect, that relates to women's understandings of beauty and meanings of female power in contemporary postfeminist media culture. Chapter 4 denotes the ways in which self-love is articulated by users as part of their processes of postfeminist self-branding and as part of their affective communication.

Upon recognizing that these women communicated a desire to love their bodies that was connected to their sense of self, I conducted a second round of data analysis to understand users' meanings and practices of self-love. This process involved unpacking self-love in regard to two aspects of postfeminist self-branding: (1) transformation of their bodies and emotions and how it relates to self-esteem and (2) self-promotion of the body and emotions as related to narcissism. While women's postfeminist self-branding afforded an understanding of their conscious efforts regarding beauty, these theories did not allow for an understanding of the women’s felt experience of their bodies and beauty. Thus, I explore my subjects' experiences of beauty in relationship to self-love in different temporalities, along the lines of the work by Coleman and Figueroa.
The following theories were applied to illuminate the users' practices of postfeminist self-branding and affective communication.

As mentioned earlier, for the study of both the cultural figures and online communities, I applied Hearn’s theory of self-branding to examine the subjects' communication of values in terms of transformation and Banet-Weiser's work on postfeminist self-branding to examine the nature of their self-promotion regarding bodies and emotions. In addition, for a fuller study of online communities, Banet-Weiser's work on postfeminist self-branding online (i.e., on YouTube and Facebook) was useful to explore how my subjects engaged in self-promotion. Since Banet-Weiser emphasized the importance of user feedback in online communities, contending that women's self-branding as it occurs online is "a layered process of judging, assessment, and valuation taking place in a media economy of visibility" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 87), I looked at the subjects' communication as well as responses by users in each group's community to the vloggers' and bloggers' videos and posts; this provided an understanding of how the subjects incorporated others' opinions in their self-brands. To further tease out women's self-promotion about their bodies, I considered Gill's theme of "the articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas" in relation to Lange's work. Lange's theory of intimacy allowed me to examine whether subjects' "shared intimacies may translate into larger spheres of social action and political participation" (2007, 5).

Specifically, I wanted to tease out whether the users' interpretations of consumer culture meanings about beauty and feminism led to community-wide efforts towards the realization of social change about beauty standards.
To add another dimension to the examination of postfeminist self-branding and self-promotion, I applied Senft's work on the cultivation of micro-celebrity in digital culture to understand how women use digital media technology to cultivate fame through self-branding. Along these lines, I questioned whether their beauty values provided my subjects a platform for crafting a personal brand that would capture others' attention. I thus looked at the data to understand how they draw on consumer culture's meanings of beauty and power in order to represent themselves as people who can help others to cultivate it.

To explore my subjects' felt experiences of their bodies and beauty, I applied Coleman and Figueroa's work on beauty and hope. Taking their view that beauty "works as an affective aesthetic feeling" (Coleman and Figueroa 2010, 261) and that hope is "an embodied affect that inclines toward the beautiful" (Coleman and Figueroa 2010, 261), I similarly explore my online subjects' experience of beauty as it is "felt in different temporalities" (Coleman and Figueroa 2010, 261). In particular, I look at the relationship between my subjects' experiences of beauty and of self-love to understand if and how self-love is, likewise, an embodied affect. I also consider if and how self-love can be understood as a "cruel optimism," following along the lines of Berlant (2011).

Research Process

Institutional Research Board (IRB) Approval Process

The observational period for these communities occurred from the beginning of IRB approval (August 2, 2011) to the present time. Two requests for continuing review were granted to extend the period for the research. Informed consent forms were not
necessary for this research, as per Rutgers' Institutional Review Board, as the research was wholly observational.
CHAPTER 2: THE POLITICS OF BEAUTY: A CULTURAL HISTORY

This chapter provides a cultural history of the politics of beauty; that is, of feminist relations to beauty culture. First, I lay out the role of the beauty industry in disseminating a series of cultural meanings about beauty, especially regarding the body, to American women. The problematic and often restrictive conceptions of beauty and the ways in which they have been connected to ideological and material consumption for female audiences are also explored. Then, I trace important moments when feminism and media have been entangled in and around the beauty industry from the early to late twentieth century. In early twentieth-century consumer culture, for instance, feminists involved in the construction of female beauty images can be seen in a relationship of ambivalence regarding their control of them. Their representations also convey conflicted meanings of female empowerment. Moreover, in this period, notions of feminism were often tied to independence and pleasure, but they could also be signified by individualism and entrepreneurship, even if the latter could only be realized by a few women.

This history provides a crucial backdrop for the case studies of cultural figures and online communities in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, which trace the ways that a neoliberal technology of the self now permeates the everyday lives of many women. Yet "love your body" messaging in contemporary consumer culture signals other tensions between self-identified feminists, the communication of feminism, and beauty culture.

The Beauty Industry and Hegemonic Beauty

In Western culture, conversations around beauty bring to mind the female form. For centuries, female beauty has been the subject of various forms of media, primarily works of art as captured by art historians Lynda Nead in *The Female Nude: Art,*
Obscenity, and Sexuality (1992), and Wendy Steiner in Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth-Century Art (2002). Media representations of beauty, though, illustrate that there have "been dramatic changes in what is considered a beautiful body. The ideal of female beauty has shifted from a symbol of fertility to one of mathematically calculated proportions" (Bonafini and Pozzilli 2011, 62).

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the American beauty industry has been an influential disseminator of normative meanings of beauty to audiences via popular culture (Record 2001, 192). As a powerful cultural institution, the industry promotes hegemonic ideals of beauty. Thus, "Cultural representations of beauty in contemporary Western societies are, by and large, homogeneous, emphasizing a feminine ideal of slenderness and firmness...[and] embrace youth and privilege whiteness as embodied in fair skin, eye color, and hair texture" (Kwan and Trautner 2009, 49). Akin to the classical association of beauty with the potential for fertility, socially acceptable beauty and behavior today upholds the heterosexual social norm. Desirable female beauty is aged, classed, and raced: the ideal is youthful, upper class, and Caucasian (Patton 2006, 32). Additionally, being beautiful means having specific bodily measurements and proportions, which are defined and disseminated by the beauty industry.

Over the twentieth century, the beauty ideal has changed from the 1920's "flapper" with slender hips and small breasts; to the hourglass shape in the 1940s and 1950s (embodied by Marilyn Monroe); to the very lean and androgynous look in the 1960s (exemplified by Twiggy); to a slim body with muscle tone in the 1980s (endorsed by actress turned fitness guru Jane Fonda); to the nearly emaciated waif look in the 1990s (symbolized by Kate Moss). In the first decade of the 2000s, the ideal continues to stress...
thin bodies. Reed-thin fashion models, so thin that media stories abound about models who have died from anorexia-related illness, are glamorized. Slender women with large breasts (denoted by Kate Upton) and who are extremely fit (athletes like Anna Kournikova) are also revered. Efforts to present a wider range of body types, such as in the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (explored in Chapter 3), display them as consumer objects denoting hypersexuality. Despite these differences across time, however, some commonalities remain: the bodies are generally ornamented in beauty-industry approved commodities, or, alternately, are in various states of undress, or both; and they represent desirability within the constraints of race, age, class, and sexuality.

The politics of beauty further relate to the ways in which cultural privilege is regulated through gender, race/ethnicity, class, and dis/ability. Hegemonic power relations construct an ideal of beauty that inherently underscores racism, classism, and ableism by privileging a Caucasian standard that marginalizes women of other races/ethnicities/physical abilities (Patton 2006, 25). Equally, however, Caucasian women whose bodies do not meet the norm of slenderness are also "displaced...for their departure from 'pure' White womanhood" (Patton 2006, 32).

Nonetheless, since the early twentieth century, consumer culture has encouraged women, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or dis/ability, to beautify themselves as a means of social mobility. This is achieved in part by appealing to a range of budgets even though luxury products and practices, as compared with mass brands, are required to gain entry into the upper class. Women who do not fit or cannot afford the necessary look are encouraged to spend money on products to approximate Caucasian beauty, or even undergo surgery, to remove signs of their heritage. Some of the more drastic methods
advertised to female racial "others" included facial surgery, particularly on the eyes and nose (Faludi 1991; Yang 2011), skin lightening to be closer to an ideal of "whiteness" (Li al 2008; Charles 2003) and modifying the texture of hair, especially by straightening it (Neal and Wilson 1989; Okazawa-Rey et al. 1987). Women with disabled bodies are excluded from the able-bodied ideal (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1995), yet they are still encouraged to "fix" whatever is possible via cosmetics or other means. The dominant ideology of beauty thus reproduces and strengthens the social hierarchy, affording visibility and potential for social advancement to those already in positions of privilege (white women with the economic means to "be beautiful") while rendering "other" bodies socially unacceptable, disadvantaged, and, often, invisible. At the same time, the cultural privilege associated with beauty encourages women -- regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or dis/ability -- to participate in beauty practices as "a means...[to] enhance their status within the dominant social order" (Stuart and Donaghue 2011, 100).

Tracing Aspirational Beauty in Consumer Culture

The power dynamics between the beauty industry and female audiences can be explored through the seminal 1944 work of Frankfurt School philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who originated the term "culture industry." In "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they propose that the media engages a network of ideological and hegemonic institutions and, as such, mass culture and communication institutions socialize people and mediate their reality, a function that carries economic, political, cultural, and social effects. Thus it produces and reproduces mass culture by "impress[ing] the same stamp on everything" (2001, 120); this sort of homogenization constitutes its core, since "the power of the culture industry resides in its
identification with a manufactured need" (2001, 137). Importantly, this industry urges the consumption of products and a consumer-driven lifestyle as a desirable norm, which Horkheimer and Adorno contend is uncritically consented to by the audience. Along these lines, the beauty industry disseminates meanings of beauty via several overlapping industries, including advertising/branding, television, cosmetics, fashion, cosmetic/bariatric surgery, and dieting. Messages are communicated to audiences through representations of the cultural norm, through strategies for engaging in beauty rituals with beauty products, and through offering tactics for weight loss that promise attainment of the desired body. This complex economic network reinforces the appeal of a narrow set of attributes and celebrates those who emulate them.

The representations of and participation of women in the beauty industry were tied to a shift from a society based on production to one fueled by consumption, which occurred in the United States following World War I (Marchand 1986; Leach 1994; Lears 1995). Industrialization in the years surrounding the war led to urbanization, an accelerated pace of daily life, the wider availability of new products, and the rise of consumer credit. These factors, in turn, gave rise to a professional middle class and the creation of individual desire for material consumption. Historian William Leach nicely articulates the relationship between production and consumption during this time: "Greater investment in mass production required greater skill in mass seduction" (1994, 298).

Beginning in the 1920s, advertisements presented enticing portrayals of modernity. Historian Roland Marchand calls these "social tableaux advertisements," and also notes that advertisers, as observers of popular culture, "recognized that consumers..."
would rather identify with scenes of higher status than ponder reflections of their actual lives" (1986, xvii). Thus, the social tableaux reflected people's social aspirations - not realities - and employed pictorial conventions in which individuals could "comfortably and pleasurably place themselves" (Marchand 1986, 167). Marchand argues that it was the merchandising strategy (the company's goal of selling the product) that determined the emphasis on fantasy in these advertisements. However, the advertisers' ideologies and illustrations created depictions of modern life that distorted consumers' views of reality and their aspirations.

In these social tableaux of the 1920s and 1930s, women were portrayed as adapting to modernity in two ways: through their power to purchase goods and through their power to shape and dress their bodies. The exercise of these powers became entwined with the representation of a female "American Dream." Women were acknowledged as America's primary consumers; market research claimed that they did eighty-five percent of the spending (Schudson 1986), and the social tableaux characterized women as the "family G.P.A" (general purchasing agent) or "Mrs. Consumer." Yet, despite showing the valued executive talents of "planning, efficiency, and expert decision-making" (Marchand 1986, 168) normally identified with a new generation of male managers, women were not accorded equal power in relationships with men or a changed social role. Thus, the power granted to women by their position as the primary consumers did not alter their subordinate role. Historian T.J. Jackson Lears offers a particularly denigrating portrait of the power of the modern woman in popular culture: Mrs. Consumer's "ravenous appetite for goods would still be a stock gag in comic strips and vaudeville humor…corporate advertising sublimated women's imagined
voracity into efficient household management" (1995, 120). Moreover, the equation of a woman's purchasing power primarily with items for the home (the archaic space of women) further reinforced her traditional role as a housewife.

In addition, these social tableaux tied women's leisure time to the modern pursuits of female self-expression (read: her appearance) that would make her an admirable partner for her modern husband (Marchand 1986). A modern lifestyle thus meant that with her newfound time, courtesy of better home management, a woman could devote herself to presenting a "modern" look that would be valued by and cater to the male. Along these lines, advertisements prescribed a particular look, complete with advice on physical stance and fashion. They presented a female body that was distinct from an older, rounder vision of women embraced by earlier generations. These "grotesque" bodies, as Marchand calls them, had fantastical and imposing proportions regarding their height (being more than a foot taller than the average woman), limbs (fingers, arms, legs, necks), and facial features (eyes). Importantly, these depictions were associated with women of high social status. Although the modern female body originated in the realm of fantasy, the slim image signified that actual women were free from their traditional maternal role since no mother of four could maintain such a figure. However, this image did not "suggest their commanding presence as new women of broader capacities and responsibilities" (Marchand 1986, 185). Instead, the fashionably attired, young, and elongated lady maintained a patriarchal relationship of domination-subordination to the modern man.

The 1920s ready-to-wear industry supported the value of slimness for women in their advertising. And into the 1940s and 1950s, fashion designers continued to view fat
as "aesthetically unpleasant" (Stearns 2002, 82), ensuring that ready-to-wear fashionable clothing was generally unavailable to those who lacked thin physiques. Critically along these lines, designers also initiated standard sizing, wherein women's bodies needed to conform to industry standards to fit into the dress, a far cry from the days when dressmakers fit the clothes to the woman. Thus, American women (particularly those in the upper class) came to understand that the modern look and a confident self-presentation demanded a thin body; fat became viewed as "an aesthetic liability" (Stearns 2002, 236).

The fat body, according to historian Peter N. Stearns in Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West (2002), became associated with cultural hostility and moral flaws. A surge of diet materials from the 1920s onwards signaled that "good" women were thin, attractive to men, and an admirable partner for a modern husband; the "bad" woman was the opposite. Popular literature stigmatized the romantic relationships of fat women, as "men disdained intercourse with overweight wives, and this could have emotional side effects on women beyond endangering the marriage" (Stearns 2002, 82). In sum, fat women were regarded as "lazy and undisciplined" (Stearns 2002, 83), and they learned to blame themselves for having a flawed character. Stearns argues that there is a link between such hostile representations in consumer culture and politics, that is, they were a response to the success of the women’s suffrage movement in the 1910s: "Newly enfranchised women [were]... told to curb their appetites and reduce, quite literally, their physical presence. In this sense, the attack on size related to a growing tendency to refer to women in diminutive and dismissive terms" (2002, 88).
The growing field of cosmetic surgery offered affluent women a means to remedy their negative feelings towards their bodies. The notion of the "inferiority complex" has been central to the history of cosmetic surgery in consumer culture. Conceptualized by Viennese psychotherapist Alfred Adler, the inferiority complex was embraced by plastic surgeons in the United States, particularly from the 1920s to the 1940s. According to historian Elizabeth Haiken, individuals became increasingly discontented with their appearance during these decades thanks, in part, to "a new, visual culture, where appearance seemed to rank ever higher in importance" (1999, 91-92). In addition to comparing themselves with those who appeared in advertisements and films, post-Depression era Americans, shaken by their economic hardships, came to believe that their physical appearance was something that they could control, and that through their looks, they might obtain the confidence to compete and achieve social and economic success. By contrast, individuals who felt that their inability to secure work and support themselves and their families was due to their unattractive appearance would develop a sense of inferiority. Seeking to cut across class lines, surgeons and other beauty experts promoted the notion that cosmetic surgery could be accessible to every woman, whether it be through taking out loans, financial arrangements with physicians, or shopping for affordable surgeons (Blum 2005, 52). While in reality cosmetic surgery was largely undertaken by more affluent Americans, its apparent democratization supported the belief that "Anyone can be beautiful" (Blum 2005, 52). In that context, the choice to have surgery denoted female empowerment as women sought to remedy their inferiority complexes. An emergent makeover paradigm was thus promoted beginning in the 1930s,
although most women had to make do with cosmetics and visits to beauty salons, rather than surgery.

Nonetheless, for those with sufficient wealth, cosmetic surgery was increasingly available. Notably, techniques of reconstructive surgery honed by doctors in World War I and II coincided with the rise of a consumer culture, which promoted beauty as an "alterable quality, the pursuit of which demanded a significant amount of time, attention, and money" (Haiken 1999, 19). A growing acceptance of cosmetic surgery to enhance one's appearance began to develop alongside non-surgical beauty-related makeovers that involved cosmetics (to change the face) and weight loss machines (to modify the body).

**Key Moments of Entanglement in Consumer Culture: Feminists, Feminism, and Beauty**

A number of scholars have analyzed the production of meanings of beauty by self-identified feminists in the media as well as the dissemination of intertwined meanings of feminism and beauty in the emerging consumer culture. The work by historians Margaret Finnegan, Kathy Peiss, Jennifer Scanlon, Amy Erdman Farrell, and Leandra Zarnow has been especially influential in analyzing the relations of self-identified feminists and female consumers in the production and consumption of beauty messages and texts across the twentieth century. These messages then became entangled in popular media texts in the late twentieth century, including those like *Ms.*, *Bitch and Bust* created by self-identified feminists (Gloria Steinem, Lisa Jervis, Andi Zeisler, Debbie Stoller, and Marcelle Karp).

**Marketing the Suffragette in Early Consumer Culture**

The ways in which feminists cultivated concepts of feminism and female beauty in early consumer culture are illuminated primarily through the work of Margaret
Finnegan (1999). Of particular importance is her research on how, since the early 1900s, feminists intuitively wielded consumer tactics to promote their political ideology to the public. In doing so, they paid careful attention to their self-presentation (via their appearance and attitude) in order to generate a positive response to feminists and feminist values.

According to Finnegan, suffragists employed numerous consumer strategies to define, and redefine, the cultural landscape in their campaign for women's right to vote. On the one hand, these acts can be interpreted as an attempt to "sell the [feminist] movement like a modern commodity" (Finnegan 1999, 3) through advertising, publicity (such as parades and public speaking events), and merchandising (suffrage buttons, banners and the like). Another interpretation is that feminists reworked consumer strategies to suit their own needs. So, for instance, when advertisers praised women's public presence as a means to sell their commodities, suffragists reframed these claims as validation of women's expansion into the public space.

In an effort to define feminism on their own terms, suffragists crafted specific representations of a feminist, which included both her attitude and appearance. Leach (1989) notes that, in general, suffragists encouraged the embrace of popular fashion from the mid-1870s onward. Finnegan carries this forward by describing how feminists who participated in parades were required to clothe themselves according to dress codes (color and type of apparel) designated by organizers. These dress codes also visually unified groups of women and united them as proponents of feminist values. By embracing a certain style and appearance in public, a woman signified that she was a feminist but also part of mainstream culture. Importantly, these self-crafted representations also suggested
that "suffragists (and thus potential women voters) were attractive, stylish, charming, dignified, and virtuous....[and] personable, likable, and modern individuals" (Finnegan 1999, 81). Through this self-presentation, feminists sought to promote an image that would attract female supporters, and male voters (who, after all, held the power to grant or deny suffrage), by presenting activists in a non-threatening way via a familiar feminine appearance and friendly demeanor.

However, the focus on suffragists' appearance raises significant concerns. For one, the use of the body (by wearing lapboards, sandwich boards, or certain fashions) to advertise a cause became "a form of spectacle" (Finnegan 1999, 62), which situated it as "susceptible to the controlling gaze of the flâneur/male voter" (Finnegan 1999, 63). In addition, homogenizing the appearance of suffragists corresponded with a one-dimensional image of feminist identity and beauty rather than promoting a complicated and diverse array of possibilities. These tactics by early feminists, like those of business leaders who sought to sell products, endorsed an idealized representation (the fashionable suffragist) to garner interest in a "product" (feminism) that was promoted as improving the lives of women. Thus, the suffragist becomes one more figure whom the ordinary woman can envy and desire. Moreover, this intentional crafting of an embodied political identity aligned consumer culture practices with feminism; to wit, suffragists "compared good voters to comparison shoppers, defined commodity-enhanced lifestyles as a right, [and] spoke in tribute to fashion and mass consumerism...[they] defined consumer-centered and -directed activity as a perfectly natural and unquestionably valid activity that made consumer culture not merely tangential to political self-definition but central to its expression and makeup" (Finnegan 1999, 12). In this way, feminists encouraged a
close relationship between the tactics of consumption and the articulation of politics. The suffragists' strategy raises questions about public displays of feminism via appearance, and especially how consumerism fits into a "feminist" appearance that echoed across the twentieth and early twenty-first century even as later generations, women’s liberationists, for instance, advanced an anti-consumerist appearance that rejected hegemonic femininity as a practice of solidarity.

In sum, then, suffragists' deployment of consumer culture strategies to advance the feminist cause provides a starting point for considering the complicated relationship between meanings of feminism and the portrayal of empowered women. By marketing feminist identity and its values via consumption, the suffragist became a commodity whose "identity as a woman citizen could be packaged, sold, and redesigned as necessary" (Finnegan 1999, 106-107). This theme has remained relevant for almost a century, as evidenced by the postfeminist self-branding of women around meanings of beauty (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Feminists in J. Walter Thompson's Editorial Department

The emergence of modern American consumer culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincided with the emergence of feminism as a distinct movement, tied to but not restricted to the suffrage movement. For many pioneer feminists, the right to secure employment, economic independence, and professional status was as important as political enfranchisement. Many women, especially in urban areas, who owned service-oriented shops that catered to women's shared beauty rituals, embraced feminist ideals of economic autonomy. They also often employed women in their businesses. Kathy Peiss characterizes these actions as feminist in essence (1998b,
86). However, by the very nature of their work (promoting the consumption of beauty ideologies and products), these female entrepreneurs merged the identities of women as consumers and as workers. As Peiss argues, in this role, businesswomen "contributed substantially to modern definitions of femininity, to the growing emphasis on making and monitoring appearance, and to the centrality of commerce and consumption in women's lives" (1998b).

By the 1920s, men educated in methods of mass production, distribution, and marketing had seized the reigns of the beauty business, using ideas forged by female pioneers to cultivate the styles and fashions they preferred (Peiss 1998b, 98). Still, in advertising agencies, women were influential in the development of texts related to beauty through positions as copywriters on "women's accounts," such as cosmetics and skin care products. At the urging of businessmen, female copywriters took on the roles of information brokers and tastemakers because of their perceived ability – based on their gender - to understand and communicate with women as consumers (Peiss 1998a).

Feminist activism around beauty continued as women created their own spaces within this new world of advertising. Notably, Helen Lansdowne Resor, called "the greatest copywriter of her generation" ("Members: Helen Lansdowne Resor" 2005) by The New York Herald Tribune, exerted profound influence as a leading copywriter on women's accounts. She married Stanley Resor soon after he was appointed executive officer of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, and "informally they discussed all aspects of the business…so decisions typically emerged with no clear line of accountability to either one" (Fox 1997, 82-83). Resor was considered a "driving, creative force at the company" (Peiss 1998a) by her peers, and she openly identified
herself as a feminist. Resor led her female colleagues in suffrage parades and worked to employ and advance women at J. Walter Thompson. One of her efforts involved the establishment of the Women's Editorial Department, which was comprised of feminists who found themselves unemployed after their involvement in the suffrage movement.

The copywriters' feminist goals were reflected in their texts. As Jennifer Scanlon notes, Resor and women like her attempted "to broaden the definition of [the] woman consumer and citizen to include themselves" (Scanlon 2000, 190). Resor's written statements suggest that she recognized that female consumers "had been looked down upon – and she saw it as the work of the…[Editorial] Department to change that" (Scanlon 2000, 190). She oversaw the construction of the copy with the dual goals of a feminist and a copywriter: "I watched the advertising to see that the idea, the wording, and the illustrating were effective for women" (Fox 1997, 81). Resor apparently felt that the job of feminists in the business world was to imbue beauty advertising and the consumer's perception of herself with a sensibility derived from feminist politics.

Despite her best intentions, however, the problematic of female beauty is evident in Resor's texts. In attempting to broaden the representation of women beyond the household, she seeded the sexual objectification of women in advertising and, ultimately, fueled a major controversy over representations of women in consumer culture (Scanlon 2000, 176). One example appears in Resor's copy for a 1915 advertisement for Woodbury soap that assured women "a skin you love to touch" (Peiss 1998b, 122).

Still, Resor enlisted feminists to reinforce the political messages in her beauty texts. This intersection was epitomized in her 1924 print advertisement for Pond's skin cream that featured the testimonial of prominent feminist and socialite Alva Belmont.
Belmont's selection was motivated by the corporate and agency strategy to give the Ponds brand status and prestige by associating it with a woman of accomplishment (Peiss 1998a). The feminist ties of the Women's Editorial Department secured Belmont's cooperation, and Belmont exacted a contribution to the National Woman's Party in return for her participation. While the copy acknowledged Belmont's feminist identity - "'Mrs. Belmont not only has given lavishly to women's causes from her colossal fortune, [but she] has been and is a tremendous worker'" (Peiss 1998b, 137) - Belmont refused to let her picture appear in the advertising, lest she be interpreted "as a shill" (Peiss 1998a). But even without her picture, the message was clear: even feminists needed cosmetics to enhance their beauty and bodies. The issues raised by the participation of women such as Resor and Belmont in such advertisements thus reflect the longstanding conflict between the goals of industry (economic gain) and feminism (expanded opportunities for women through political activism).

Commodity Feminism

While self-identified feminists produced understandings of feminism and beauty for popular audiences, such messages were also created by non-feminists in the advertising industry. Since the 1960s, "second wave" feminists have been associated mainly with critiques of the ways that advertising represents women through images and language that support patriarchal power. For instance, Susan Brownmiller denounced "certain arbitrary cues and symbols – [like] a hair style…[that] act as conservators of outworn social values and as levers against social change" (1984, 236), and Simone de Beauvoir critiqued the social meaning of femininity in relation to feminism: "The 'feminine' woman…occupies herself in catching [men by]…submissively making herself
a thing. The emancipated woman, on the contrary, wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her" (1949, 676). Advocates of women’s liberation were especially antagonistic to the beauty industry and its advertising which they claimed objectified and sexualized women. In 1971, a Redstocking Sister proclaimed: "The real evil of the media image of women is that it supports the sexist status quo. In a sense, fashion, cosmetics, and 'feminine hygiene' ads are aimed more at men than at women. They encourage men to expect women to sport all the latest trappings of sexual slavery—expectations women must then fulfill if they are to survive" (qtd. in Craig 2003, 483).

The declining sales of cosmetics and other products that feminists characterized as problematic prompted advertisers to respond (Talbot 2000, 178). To boost their sales, they developed messages that seemingly supported feminist values and commandeered feminist discourse as a strategy to achieve audience identification. As media scholar Steve Craig argues, "advertisers tended to exploit the enthusiasm of the women's movement, co-opt its rhetoric, and present audiences with the images they wished to see…. [the] cosmetics industry – those most threatened by liberation – even exploited many women's fear of lost gender identity to recoup lost market share" (2003, 23). Feminists were perceived as both a new consumer market, open to products that reinforced and legitimatized their countercultural identity, and as a spur to the consumption of traditional products by women who feared the gender challenges activists posed.

Advertising discourse focused primarily on bourgeois, or liberal, feminist values that signified women's freedom, equal opportunity, and personal fulfillment (Talbot 2000, 179). Sociologist Robert Goldman named this approach "commodity feminism," which
he defined as the "process of turning feminism into sign values [that] fetishize feminism into an iconography of things….Sign-objects are thus made to stand for, and made equivalent to, feminist goals of independence and professional success" (2005, 131). Critically, such appropriations of feminism de-valued the meaning of its politics. By removing the political context, feminist social goals were trivialized as "a lifestyle accessory" (Talbot 2000, 187). As journalist Thomas Frank notes, "Feminism, as it was understood by the [advertising] industry in the late sixties and early seventies, was an almost perfect product pitch" (1998, 152). A notable example of this was Virginia Slims' 1968 campaign with the slogan "You've Come A Long Way, Baby;" its success, according to one marketing executive, "set a new tone in women's products advertising" (Craig 2003, 19).

Concurrent with the rise of commodity feminism, the number of women employed in the advertising industry increased from 49,400 in 1973 to 149,070 in 1986 (Lazier-Smith 1989, 251). Many women achieved significant leadership positions, such as Reva Korda (the first female creative head at Ogilvy & Mather) and Charlotte Beers (J. Walter Thompson's first female senior vice-president). Few openly talked about their feminist leanings. When Mary Wells Lawrence, founding president of Wells, Rich, Greene, did, her comments convey awareness of the implicit conflict between her political ideology and advertising values: "I'm not a feminist, not in the serious, activist sense….but I have a very strong feminist feeling about things like the Equal Rights Amendment and salaries. I feel strongly about the unfairness that exists" (Fox 1997, 322). This awareness of conflict was evidenced at a number of levels. Lois Geraci Ernst, president and creative director of Advertising to Women, produced spots that employed
feminist discourse, such as in Jean Nate body spray (showing a sexualized woman with
the slogan, "Take charge of your life") and Rive Gauche perfume (depicting a woman
driving alone, "having too much fun to marry"). In response to the feminist critique of
these ads, she declared, "If women's lib doesn't like it...that's tough" (Fox 1997, 323).
Francheille Cadwell, president of Cadwell Davis, Inc., also appeared to prioritize
business over politics, considering "the need for change [using feminist discourse] more
as pragmatism than politics - revising the image of women in advertisements simply
made good business sense" (Craig 2003, 17).

The rhetoric of advertisements has continued to mirror shifts in feminist thought
and practice across the "waves" and across American culture. 1980s media messaging,
influenced by Christopher Lasch's (1991) The Culture of Narcissism, presented
"narcissism as liberation" (Douglas 2000; see more on narcissism in Chapter 1), which
inaugurated a "culture of pampering" associating women's freedom with "the
consumption of scented candles and bubble-bath" (Tyler 2005, 28). Third wave
introspection about race, class, age, and sexual preference as "the multiple, constantly
shifting bases of oppression...[that relate] to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of
identity" (Heywood and Drake 1997, 3) was likewise simplified in Nike adverts
encouraging "women to activate a true inner self and overcome social forces that now
block that deep self from realizing itself" (Goldman and Papson 1996, 172). The efforts
of third wave feminists to place their politics in media texts (Bitch and Bust) are
described later in this chapter.
Popular Feminism and *Ms.*

The tensions created by merging feminists, media texts, and beauty is illustrated further through the career of Gloria Steinem, the influential co-founder and editor of *Ms.* magazine. Steinem brought feminists into the workplace to communicate their ideologies to female audiences through *Ms.* and, in doing so, to carve out a popular feminist enterprise in patriarchal culture. As the producer and disseminator of a mass media magazine, Steinem was instrumental in bringing feminist ideology into consumer culture.

As American Studies scholar Amy Erdman Farrell discusses in *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism,* "the history of *Ms.* is about the creation of popular feminism itself, the…attempt by [feminists]…to engage a mass audience using the commercial media as their vehicle. As such, the history of *Ms.* is, in the end, about the possibilities and limitations of forging an oppositional politics within the context of commercial culture" (1998, 2).

Farrell notes that a shift occurred in the magazine's content from the 1970s to the 1980s. In the 1970s, *Ms.* functioned as a voice for prominent feminist authors articulating crucial ideas and concepts of a diverse and growing movement, while also serving as a space for consciousness-raising and the discussion of social issues, like the double-day, sexual violence, educational discrimination, and the Equal Rights Amendment. However, in the 1980s a transformation occurred "in the way the magazine packaged itself, sold itself to readers and advertisers, and presented the ideology and issues of feminism" (Farrell 1998, 114). *Ms.* increasingly emphasized self-help and sought a mass, though still feminist, audience. In fact, *Ms.* presented feminist views of female beauty that could be
interpreted, both textually and economically, and in its good intentions, as a mirror of Resor's. As Farrell writes:

In September 1977, "Ms. had published an issue on women and body image; the cover pictured a slim white woman's torso, with the words 'Why Women Hate Their Bodies' tattooed on her back. Some readers objected to this cover as a 'cheap method of selling magazines,' but editors responded that they had attempted to make a statement about the ways all women, even those with the most culturally perfect bodies, experienced self-hate about their bodies. By the 1980s, this focus on the politics of health and the politics of body image had evolved into a yearly issue entitled 'The Beauty of Health.' The covers on these issues...were no longer making a complex statement about women's relationship to their bodies. The May 1984 cover provides a revealing contrast to the 1977 cover, as it too pictured the back of a white woman's torso. This time, though, no tattooed words forced the reader to question this representation of women; rather, the woman was pictured in the shower, with soap sensuously dripping down her naked back. In addition, the title itself, 'The Beauty of Health,' directed attention from any 'feminist' articles contained in the issue and provided a perfect set-up for advertisers to sell their products. (1998, 115-116)

"Ms., then, ushered in a trend by which female beauty culture, in the guise of feminist politics, became associated with "self-help" and mental "health." In addition, by bridging feminist and beauty ideologies through carefully selected images and words, Steinem (and her fellow editors) appeared to embrace the "sex sells" mentality of the beauty industry in order to benefit the magazine. Viewed in this light, Steinem had come to support a view of identity that targets women as ideological and material consumers of the dominant ideology of beauty.

The relationship between "Ms. and beauty advertisers strengthened in the 1980s. By 1984, the magazine's annual health issue had morphed into a beauty issue, a move that Farrell states "was much easier for the marketing staff to sell to advertisers with flyers such as 'Healthy, Wealthy and Wise,' which promoted [to] advertisers an 'environment tailor-made for them'" (1998, 145). Steinem also sought to engage with the beauty
industry at a critical juncture in the magazine's history. Fearing for its survival in 1986, she sought a financial partnership with Leonard Lauder, president of the beauty empire founded by his mother Estee Lauder. The sentiments Steinem expressed revolved around her attempts to maintain editorial integrity. She wanted advertisers to "come in without the usual quid pro quo of 'complementary copy'" (2002, 223), and she saw Lauder as a potentially powerful ally because his "ad practices [we]re followed by the beauty industry...[and he] could liberate many pages in all women's magazines just by changing his mind about 'complementary copy'" (2002, 228). Lauder rejected Steinem's offer, perhaps because he did not agree with her restrictions or possibly because of the reason he gave her: he viewed his customers as different than Steinem's audience, claiming "Ms. readers are not our women....Estee Lauder is selling 'a kept-woman mentality'" (2002, 229). Steinem countered that his customers "generally resemble Ms. readers" (2002, 229), as "Sixty percent of the users of his products are salaried" (2002, 229). She added that Ms. readers would be attracted to the image of a company launched by "a creative and hardworking woman" (2002, 229). However, Lauder did not change his opinion and rejected the magazine as an advertising outlet.

While the decision to align Ms. with the beauty industry was motivated by a serious lack of funds, it nonetheless suggests an implicit acceptance of the idea that patriarchal beauty ideologies can be incorporated into feminist texts. In addition, although Steinem did attempt to place boundaries on the relationship between popularized feminist ideologies and beauty advertising, she also seemed to understand the necessity of securing her position of power in consumer culture by making accommodations. This account of Steinem illustrates some of the discomforting issues
that constitute the alliance between feminist activism/feminist media and beauty messaging. It also serves as a backdrop for understanding the production of increasingly problematic "feminist" messaging in contemporary culture.

Complicated Meanings of Beauty, Feminism, and Female Power in *Bitch* and *Bust*

The strategies of activists regarding female beauty in popular "third wave" feminist texts *Bitch* and *Bust* also illuminate the complex intersections of feminism and beauty in popular culture. Even though *Bitch* and *Bust* are both produced by third wavers, the meaning of female power in relation to beauty and the body differs in the two magazines: *Bitch* aims to generate consciousness-raising and the discussion of social issues (including beauty) among women, while *Bust* (in the vein of Girlie Culture, as will be discussed) offers space for commodified images of the female body.

*Bitch* and *Bust* both began as "zines," self-published Xerox-and-staple journals that became prevalent in the 1990s; due to their popularity, they evolved into glossy magazines. Debbie Stoller and Marcelle Karp created *Bust* in 1993, and Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler launched *Bitch* three years later. Just as the name "*Ms.*" reclaimed patriarchal language for second wave feminists and emphasized female agency regarding women's relationships to men, their own bodies, and modes of expression, so did the names "*Bust*" and "*Bitch.*" *Ms.* pioneered a new form of address unrelated to marital status that highlighted female autonomy: "The *Ms.* woman as independent. She would not be defined by her relationship, or lack of it, to a man" (Thom 1997, 14). Third wave publications toyed with patriarchal language and modified it to speak to the ability of women to recoup their sense of power regarding their bodies. The word "*Bust*" was an "aggressive double entendre [that] made you think of tits and of breaking through
barriers" (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 147), while the word "Bitch" challenged its socially pejorative use: "If being opinionated makes me a bitch, then bring it on!" (Freedman 2003, 324). Like Ms., these texts constructed feminist spaces to serve, ostensibly, as sites for social change.

*Bitch* claims to focus on challenging media representations of women. The editors identify it as a journal of media criticism that examines sexism in popular culture through critiques informed by influential feminist scholars such as Susan Bordo and bell hooks. The editors describe their mission in activist language that addresses real-world problems faced by women every day: "We might not be able to stop teenage girls from, say, taking their cues about personal worth from *America's Next Top Model*…but we can ask them…to look at the machinations behind that 'reality'" (Jervis and Zeisler 2006, 284). In essence, *Bitch* sought to become an intelligent, resistant feminist space within popular culture whose discourse and representations would lead to "a necessary step in feminist politicalization" (Zarnow 2010, 402) in society.

*Bitch*s dedication to political action regarding dominant ideologies of female beauty is reflected through the voices of feminist activists who recount their experiences in the journal. For example, in "Please Don't Feed the Models: A Day in the Life of an Urban Guerrilla," Kathy Bruin describes her experience of "posting" (putting up posters) as a member of About-Face, a non-profit organization whose mission is to combat negative media images of women. Bruin offers a detailed account of her desire to do something about Calvin Klein advertisements that displayed the extremely thin, nude body of fashion model Kate Moss. She explains, "I wanted to do something louder than just writing Calvin Klein a letter. I took a picture of the ad and changed the text to read,
'Emaciation Stinks – Stop Starvation Imagery.' I made posters and… plaster[ed] the city with them" (Bruin 2006, 331-2).

Bruin emphasizes the need to have a strong sense of self in relation to notions of female beauty and the body. She attaches emotional importance to an act that extends from the personal to the political: "Postering is thrilling. . . It makes you feel powerful and righteous and brave; it makes you think you can effect real change in the world if you just decide to do it" (Bruin 2006, 333). Although Bruin acknowledges that the four hundred posters distributed by her group "won't be as noticed as a Calvin Klein billboard, they will still produce a reaction in people…Maybe someone will be inspired to make a loud statement of her own" (Bruin 2006, 334).

In contrast, Bust, which embraces Girlie Culture, employs "new configurations of femininity" (Siegel 2007, 146) to enhance young women's sense of power and freedom. These third wavers responded to what they deemed repressive styling by second wavers (who, for example, wore pants, jackets that hid their form, functional shoes, and no makeup) with a "deliberate decision to deploy the trappings of femininity in a conscious, even parodic way" (Dicker 2008, 123). They seek to reclaim the meaning and appearance of femininity from the patriarchal gaze, and the use of parody is recognized in many contemporary feminist circles as a form of activism. The "Girlies" are a visible third wave group that exemplifies this sort of parody. As Baumgardner and Richards write in Manifesta, Girlies approach the notion of beauty in a different way than second wavers, who largely rejected the beauty industry. They welcome "such formerly disparaged girl things as knitting, the color pink, nail polish, and fun" (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 80), and are openly sexual, a response to the stereotypes of second wavers as asexual and
frigid (Dicker 2008). The Girlie philosophy emphasizes a sense of strong female power in regard to notions of female beauty, the body, and sexuality, asserting that "women are free agents in the world…they start out strong and…the odds are in their favor" (Baumgartner and Richards 2000, 134). Girlies, then, present a complex response to women’s liberationists: they separate themselves from the anti-beauty industry practices of these earlier feminists as well as the stereotypes of them as sexually cold.

Feminist writer Deborah Siegel remarks, "For Bust readers and writers, revolution took place through representation" (2007, 145) that was under the control of women. Indeed, several scholars emphasize that Bust's primary communication is visual (while Bitch appears to concentrate on the verbal). Bust presents articles about owning one's sexuality alongside "buxom images from vintage soft-core porn" (Baumgartner and Richards 2000, 133) in which the bodies are "alternately or simultaneously girlish and assertive, slutty and wholesome or pure" (Siegel 2007, 146). The parody of re-claiming the female body and effectively personifying its name appears in the first editorial, which was shaped "in the form of a bulging bra" (Zarnow 2010, 393). For feminist scholars looking at the visual nature of the text, Bust provides "a new space that uses humor as a means of resistance and control" (D’Enbeau 2009, 17). Thus, the agency of Bust's producers is evident. However, the agency of Bust's readers and contributors may not be as strong. This point is taken up by feminist scholar Elizabeth Groeneveld in her 2009 article, "Be a Feminist or Just Dress Like One." By contrast, communication studies scholar Suzy D'Enbeau argues in her 2009 piece, "Feminine and Feminist Transformation in Popular Culture" that Bust's use of humor and language signals it as a text of resistance to patriarchal control.
Bust entered popular culture through a complicated representation of the sexual female body. As historian Leandra Zarnow writes, "It took a pregnant belly adorned in body paint spelling 'sex,' Bust's fourth issue cover shot, to attract mainstream media interest in the magazine" (2010, 397). This strategy is reminiscent of the content shift at Ms. as editors tried to popularize the magazine through greater attention to female bodies in the 1980s. Notably, Zarnow argues that Bust commodifies feminism in a style comparable to the Ms. magazine of that era.

Bust also suggests an intimate association between individual female power and economic power. As Zarnow remarks, Bust "fashioned a feminist culture that was diverse in lifestyle choice only for those who could buy in" (2010, 400). For instance, it "direct[s] readers to vintage shops, fashion designers, and on-line stores that passed their standards of cool. Purchasing power is political power, they told readers" (Zarnow 2010, 399-400). Bust's commodified Girlie Culture also connotes a commodified view of female beauty – like the beauty industry itself - that is expressed through consumption of Bust-approved goods and Bust-constructed representations. Moreover, the de-contextualization of the parodic meaning of Bust's images might, ironically, lead "an unassuming consumer passing by the neighborhood newsstand...[to] assume that a magazine named Bust was a girlie magazine, rife with pin-up spreads" (Siegel 2007, 144) rather than a third wave feminist text.

Ultimately, then, Bust, despite its best intentions, supports women's identity as ideological and material consumers of dominant ideologies of beauty and offers a third wave popular text that ideologically and visually aligns with those views. Just as importantly, the parody of third wave Girlie Culture can easily lose its meaning when
contextualized and popularized by consumer culture. This commodification of feminism by feminists signals the muddy terrain in early twenty-first consumer culture regarding messages of female power and beauty.

**Self-Love At the Nexus of Feminists and Beauty in Consumer Culture**

At the turn of the twentieth century, a Woodbury Soap ad touted the phrase "a skin you love to touch." Fast forward to the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which the Victoria's Secret's "Love My Body" Campaign proclaims, "Love your body, love yourself; I love my body, I love myself." Both texts draw on sentiments of love to entice the female consumer to purchase beauty/fashion products. However, their meanings are quite different, given the twenty-first century context of neoliberalism and postfeminism.

In the 1990s, self-love messaging, perhaps the precursor to the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (discussed in Chapter 3), was advanced by The Body Shop's "Love Your Body" Campaign (which continues today, in the form of a "Love Your Body" Loyalty Program). The Body Shop began featuring a rubenesque doll named Ruby (Figs. 9 and 10) after the company began "suffering sales declines . . . in the face of intensifying competition" (Elliott 1997). As a *New York Times* article stated at the launch of the Campaign, the marketing strategy was "indicative of a growing trend: sales pitches that mock or tweak conventional methods of peddling products, particularly images that are perceived as persuading women to conform to certain ideals of appearance" (Elliott 1997). Concurrent with the emergence of such messaging was the publication of Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, which associated representations of women in popular media with the lowering of women's self-esteem:
It is often said that we must make fashion and advertising images include us, but this is a dangerously optimistic misunderstanding of how the market works. Advertising aimed at women works by lowering our self-esteem. If it flatters our self-esteem, it is not effective. Let's abandon this hope of looking to the index fully to include us. It won't, because if it does, it has lost its function. As long as the definition of 'beauty' comes from outside women, we will continue to be manipulated by it" (1990, 227).

But Wolf experienced a change of heart a decade later, and her association with the Dove Campaign signaled the saturation of postfeminism in Western culture, wherein "Girls' self-esteem in the early 21st century...is remarkably brandable" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 19). Her shifting views on beauty also highlight the lack of widespread feminist critique for popular audiences in the face of postfeminist discourse about self-esteem, beauty, and the body. In 2010, Orbach, another Dove supporter, addressed women's discontent by declaring, "What worries me is that nowadays the body is transforming the mind. You feel bad about your body, so you feel bad about yourself. It used to be that the two were separate. Self-obsession is an attempt to quiet that distress, and it's very corrosive and undermining" (Devine 2010).

The body, then, is a very real site on which women perform actions that can be harmful both to their physical and emotional health. Specifically referencing those with eating disorders, Bordo theorized that they embody the "unstable double bind of consumer capitalism" (1993, 201). While the anorexic represents "the tantalizing idea of a well-managed self in which all is kept in order despite the contradictions of consumer culture" (Bordo 1993, 201), the bulimic signifies the unreserved consumption that defines consumer culture, and also indicates the need for this overconsumption to be managed (which, for the bulimic, is controlled through purging).

There is a glut of popular books available to audiences about "loving your

Self-identified feminists have also advocated a "love your body" message, paralleling to some extent the consumerist and self-help discourses just described. In 1998, the National Organization for Women (NOW) Foundation initiated a "Love Your Body" campaign, which actively and directly reached out to women and girls to engage them in events and activities about media portrayals of women. They, however, recognized that the "beauty template women are expected to follow is extremely narrow,
unrealistic and frequently hazardous to their health" ("Love Your Body" 2014). In 2014, their website reads:

Love Your Body

Every day, in so many ways, the beauty industry (and the media in general) tell women and girls that being admired, envied and desired based on their looks is a primary function of true womanhood. The beauty template women are expected to follow is extremely narrow, unrealistic and frequently hazardous to their health. The Love Your Body campaign challenges the message that a woman’s value is best measured through her willingness and ability to embody current beauty standards. ("Love Your Body" 2014).

The above meanings are critical of the beauty industry, and similar in tone to those of the Dove Campaign. Importantly, NOW diverges from Dove/Unilever in the deployment of their cause to audiences. NOW's primary focus is activism and education, rather than consumerism and brand attachment.

While self-help focused on bodies remain central to much of beauty, and anti-beauty, discourse, emotions have now become big business in consumer culture as well. Media scholar Henry Jenkins' concept of affective economics captures the current relationship between affect, media producers, audiences, and advertising sponsors. He characterizes affective economics as a "new configuration of marketing theory. . .which seeks to understand the emotional underpinnings of consumer decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions" (2008, 61-62). He mentions Lovemarks as an example of a current consumer culture strategy that invites emotional bonding with media products/corporate identities. Invented by Kevin Roberts, the CEO of advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, Lovemarks replaces traditional notions of branding. Roberts contends that this approach attracts brand loyalty by commanding consumer love for the brand through the communication of mystery, sensuality, and intimacy. He describes Lovemarks as an effort to draw on people's emotions: "emotions
are a serious opportunity to get in touch with consumers. And best of all, emotion is an unlimited resource. It's always there, waiting to be tapped with new ideas, new inspirations, and new experiences" (qtd. in Jenkins 2008, 70). Love as part of affective economics provides a context for understanding cultural figures' brand messages of self-esteem and narcissism (Chapter 3) as well as female users' meanings and practices of self-love that emerge from their postfeminist self-brands (Chapter 4).

Conceptualizing Self-Love in Western Culture

As will be illuminated in Chapter 4, the online subjects' processes of postfeminist self-branding and their affective communication elucidate meanings, practices, and feelings of self-love in connection to their expressions about beauty and female power. This section lays out the concept of self-love and its associated notions of self-esteem, narcissism, and self-respect. The tensions in users' communication of self-love, whereby loving the body is presented as key to loving the self as part of the formation of subjectivity in postfeminist media culture, are discussed in Chapter 5.

Berlant locates a growing cultural acceptance of self-help in America in the twentieth century, calling it "a therapeutic or self-help' culture...in which it is presumed that individuals can and need to fix themselves" (2012, 15). Sociologist Verta Taylor (1996) locates the roots of the self-help movement in second wave feminism in the 1970s. Carol Hanisch's (1970) "The Personal is Political" was an instrumental text of that time; it advocated for women to develop awareness about the connections between the self and structural inequalities. This approach to self-knowledge would involve women's consciousness raising about the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society as part of the process of women realizing their own "voice" and advocating against social oppression in
order to improve their everyday lives.

As described by Taylor, feminist efforts at self-help regarding the body were central to the 1969 Women's Liberation Conference, where women participated in "a consciousness-raising group to discuss, research, and teach about women's health issues" (1996, 63). A group that convened there later formed the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, which produced the influential volume, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. At that time, members of this movement "envisaged self-help as a way to learn more about their own bodies, but their vision went beyond self-care and a critique of the assumptions and practices of the medical establishment to pose a challenge to gender relations as a whole" (Taylor 1996, 64). Feminist media studies scholar Imogen Tyler argues that *Our Bodies, Ourselves* "Encourag[ed] women to 'discover their bodies'...[and] further disseminated the politics of self-esteem and self-love" (2005, 32).

Taylor notes that female audiences developed an understanding of self-help in relation to popular feminist books, beginning with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. She also suggests that a change in feminist meanings of self-help occurred between the 1970s and the 1990s. In the 1970s,

the feminist rallying cry that 'the personal is political' justified self-help strategies...But by the 1990s, self-help had taken on quite a different cast...[that] encourage[d] women to put a feminist veneer on such activities as recovering from addiction and abuse, getting in touch with one's inner child, and restoring self-esteem, while stressing private and therapeutic solutions over public and institutional challenges to the inequalities of gender, race, and class. (1996, 7)

An exemplar of this change is Gloria Steinem’s 1990 book, *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*. As noted by a *Los Angeles Times* blurb appearing on
its back cover, this bestseller was "The ultimate self-help book." Steinem situated women's realization of self-esteem in their everyday lives as a centrally important pursuit, stating, "I began to understand that self-esteem isn't everything; it's just that there's nothing without it" (1990, 26). Steinem's claims about self-esteem also inferred an Aristotelian meaning of self-love: "we can't love each other until we love ourselves" (1990, 40). As a feminist figurehead, Steinem’s conflation of self-esteem with self-love thus circulated as part of popular conceptions of feminism.

Of note, Steinem places accountability for the lack of self-esteem on the individual and minimizes the significance of the external (structural) barriers that inhibit progress for women. This view of self-esteem mirrors its definition as a contemporary psychological concept, as defined by the *APA Dictionary*, which likewise focuses on the individual: "A generalized evaluative attitude toward the self that influences both moods and behavior and that exerts a powerful effect on a range of personal and social behaviors" ("APA Glossary of Psychological Terms" 2014).

Some feminists critiqued Steinem's book as representing self-help in an apolitical way. A review by David Futrelle (1992) for the *Chicago Reader* assesses the book similarly. As Futrelle asserts: "the book is an attempt to reverse one of the fundamental insights of feminism: the idea that the personal is political... But in her analysis she seems to have forgotten most of the central lessons of contemporary feminism." He further criticizes Steinem’s text for presenting self-esteem as a "magic" cure to achieve "psychic successes." Finally, Futrelle claims that Steinem "never clearly defines self-esteem, and it becomes a catchall for everything from individual self-doubt to vague all-encompassing notions such as national will;"
moreover, he sees her logic of self-esteem as "a form of self-hatred wrapped in the language of self-improvement." Steinem's book and responses to it illuminate the complexities of communication (especially by feminists) about self-esteem in popular culture, issues addressed in this project as they relate to the production and consumption of meanings, practices, and feelings of beauty.

Concurrent with the discourse about self-help and self-esteem in Western culture has been discussions of narcissism. While self-help and self-esteem correspond with positive meanings of self-improvement in a growing neoliberal culture, narcissism carries negative connotations of self-indulgence and self-interest.

Since the 1970s, popular writers and academics have argued that contemporary culture is defined by and also breeds narcissism, an exaggerated form of self-esteem. In her 2007 article "From 'The Me Decade' to 'The Me Millenium:' The Cultural History of Narcissism," feminist media scholar Imogen Tyler contends that the dissemination of cultural meanings of narcissism can be tied to two popular 1970s works: Tom Wolfe’s article "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening" (1976) and Christopher Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1978). Tyler argues that these publications -- especially Wolfe's -- associated meanings of feminism with narcissism. Wolfe viewed narcissism as a negative personal attribute of feminists, and his critique of feminism along these lines was influential in how feminist politics came to be viewed in popular culture. These meanings are especially problematic when paired with Lasch's contemporaneous view of the narcissist as one who is "'inner-directed,' lives only in the present, demands 'instant gratification,' has little moral or ethical capability and is sexually permissive and perverse" (Tyler 2007, 353), which, she
asserts, misreads Sigmund Freud's theory of narcissism as more negative than he intended.

In the 1950s, the diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder came into existence in psychiatry, rooted in the influential twentieth century science of the mind: psychoanalysis. Freud, the founding father of psychoanalysis, identified two forms of narcissism: primary and secondary. The first he regarded as a normal, autoerotic, libidinal attachment occurring early in life and associated with physical survival, emotional gratification, and teaching about the social world. The second, however, he considered to be pathological and occurring later in life. He viewed it as a withdrawal from the world, a failure to move beyond self-love into love through care for others, and an inability to receive love from others in return. This form of narcissism has been called by gender scholar Sarah Gamble "a thesis on morbid self-love" (2010, 257).

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the definition of self-love in the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2007) refers the reader to entries on narcissism. Self-love is defined as "1. Regard for and interest in one’s own being or contentment. 2. Excessive self-regard, or a narcissistic attitude toward one’s own body, abilities, or personality." Essentially, the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* identifies narcissism with "excessive self-love."

Narcissism has been promoted to women via the consumer culture strategy of commodity feminism, which sings the benefits of "narcissism as liberation" (Douglas 2000). Since the 1980s, according to media scholar Susan Douglas, an association between narcissism and women's liberation has been repeatedly made by the beauty industry:
Advertising agencies had figured out how to make feminism – and anti-feminism – work for them ... the appropriation of feminist desires and feminist rhetoric by Revlon, Lancome and other major corporations was nothing short of spectacular. Women’s liberation metamorphosed into female narcissism unchained as political concepts and goals like liberation and equality were collapsed into distinctly personal, private desires. (2000, 247–8)

The continuation of these sorts of strategies has intensified in postfeminism, which has also shifted ways of looking. That is, according to Gill, women are no longer under the sole judgment of the male gaze -- rather, twenty-first century women are now under "a self policing narcissistic gaze" (2007a, 250) that incites self-surveillance via a value of self-improvement.

More recently, researchers have identified the presence of narcissism in digital culture, especially on social networking sites. Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell declare in their book The Narcissism Epidemic (2009) that the widespread emphasis on building self-confidence has gone awry, assisted by social networking sites, to favor supporting an individual's narcissistic tendencies. In her study on postfeminist self-branding online, Banet-Weiser draws on Twenge and Campbell's work, and additionally points out that, "If narcissism is one of the defining personality characteristics of this generation, digital media are its official method" (2012, 88).

In "Narcissism and Social Networking Web Sites," psychologists Laura E. Buffardi and W. Keith Campbell explore the materialization of narcissism online by studying users' "activity, content, and perception by others" (2008, 1310). Central to their findings was a correlation between users' self-promotion and their determination of "narcissistic personality scores" (2008, 1310). The authors asserted that narcissism was tied to an overall "self-promoting self-presentation...[as articulated through] the quantity
of information listed about self, self-promoting pictures, and provocative pictures" (2008, 1310). Additionally, the authors suggest that narcissistic individuals are more likely to participate in social media. Along similar lines, new media researcher Louis Leung looked specifically at the narcissism of subjects (as evidenced in their user generated content) who are part of the Net Generation. He found that individuals with narcissistic personalities participate in social media "to show affection, express their negative feelings, and achieve recognition" (2013, 997), and he concludes that "highly narcissistic subjects are likely to participate actively in social media content-generation" (2013, 997-998).

Media studies scholars Carla Zdanow and Bianca Wright offer their perspective on narcissism in relation the formation of contemporary subjectivity. They contend that there is a "connection between the use of this form of new media and the engenderment of an acutely consumerist and narcissistic subjectivity. That is, the role of new media technologies in the promotion of narcissistic identity construction is examined as a factor of particular significance in the formation of contemporary subjectivity" (2013, 63). By looking at the structural component of Facebook -- the timeline, news feed, number of friends, "what's on your mind" function, and more -- the authors place the formation of this subjectivity as an outgrowth of "the relationship between social media and narcissism within the context of late/advanced capitalism" (2013, 67).

A working understanding of narcissism as it relates to feminism and occurs in consumer and digital cultures underpins this project. The subjects interact in an online space that has been aligned with the formation of a narcissistic subjectivity. Furthermore, they have grown up in a culture that has associated aspects of feminism and self-love
with narcissism. These spaces and contexts provide a backdrop for interrogating the subjects' understandings of feminism and self-love and the ways in which they constitute contemporary gendered subjectivity. Some narcissistic traits that will be addressed in this study include preoccupation with the self, with the perceptions of others about the self, and with fantasies of unlimited success, power and beauty; a sense of entitlement and exploitation of others; a need for excessive admiration; envy of others; and a need to prove oneself to others and to oneself (Seltzer 2013).

Feminist theologian Valerie Saiving Goldstein links love of self with self-respect rather than self-esteem or narcissism. In her pioneering 1960 article, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," Goldstein painted a portrait of the complexities of self-love for women in a culture of Christian values. Examining the teachings of agape (sacrificial love; God's, or Jesus' unconditional love for humans, which humans reciprocate and extend to love of others), she explored the ways in which Christian views of self-love and love of others have contributed to the subjugation of women. Goldstein defines the Christian theological view of love as "completely self-giving, taking no thought for its own interests but seeking only the good of the other. Love makes no value judgments concerning the other’s worth; it demands neither merit in the other nor recompense for itself but gives itself freely, fully, and without calculation" (1960, 101). She questions what these doctrines, developed and sustained by men, mean for women, especially regarding the emphasis on sacrifice for others. For Goldstein, the problem is that through this teaching, the ideal woman’s life is one in which she surrenders her freedom and subsumes her identity in order to care for others. In this role, women are likely to suffer not from lack of love for others but from the "sins" of "triviality, distractibility, and
diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one’s own self-definition...in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self" (1960, 109).

Theologian Darlene Fozard Weaver, in her book *Self-Love and Christian Ethics*, adds that "the feminist critique of sacrificial agape contributes the crucial insight that one can sin by failing to establish oneself as a self" (2002, 69).

Focusing on the value of self-respect is, for philosopher Robin S. Dillon, a way that women can shift the aforementioned notion of self-love to a "feminist revisioning" (1992, 55) and a "revisioning of ourselves" (1992, 59). For Dillon, self-respect means identifying one's personhood as having a moral value, with one's actions following suit. She proposes that recouping self-respect involves highlighting that "I am, in and of myself, worthy of my own care and of the care of others, that it is morally appropriate for me to care for myself, indeed that I sometimes ought to care for myself" (Dillon 1992, 62). Acceptance and patience support women’s process of facing, acknowledging, and dealing with all aspects of the self, "reclaiming oneself from oppression through one’s insistence that one is worthy of being known, that self-understanding is appropriate, warranted, indeed called for – what any self-respecting person must do" (Dillon 1992, 65).

In examining love of the self (her preferred term), self-esteem, and self-respect, philosopher Pauline Chazan argues that self-respect is a moral relation, being "a sense of one's inner worth as a person" (1998, 43). Self-esteem is a valuing of the self based on observable achievements, and love of the self (or self-love) derives from "one's own capacity to shape one's own self according to what one finds to be of ultimate importance" (Chazan 1998, 49). For Chazan, a person who does not love the self also will
lack self-respect but may still have self-esteem. Self-respect, in this light, is, for her, the greater value.

Valuing of one’s own being through self-love has also been advocated by black feminist scholars and activists like bell hooks. She has argued, "The one person who will never leave us, whom we will never lose, is ourself. Learning to love our female selves is where our search for love must begin" (hooks 2002, 104).

In black feminist politics, as elaborated by Jennifer Nash, self-love stands at the core as a "resistant ethic of self-care" (2011, 2) that "might be read as a practice of self-valuation" (2011, 3). Love for the other intertwines with love for the self, as exemplified in Alice Walker's work, wherein self-love "functions as a prerequisite for the other kinds of humanistic, sensual, erotic, and spiritual loves that the womanist embodies. Self-love, it seems, is the only love that must always exist; it is the love that enables the other loves Walker's womanist embodies, engenders, and relishes" (Nash 2011, 10). When black women congregate to share their problems and understand them, love and self-love are at the core of this community dynamic.

This section has traced out the notion of self-love through associated concepts of self-respect, self-esteem, and narcissism. Self-love is explored in Chapter 4 in relation to the users' communication of beauty as a complicated value and feeling. Their struggles and ambivalences around self-love are explored in Chapter 5.

This chapter has provided a history of feminism and media culture around the production and consumption of meanings of beauty. Looking at the participation of feminists within and around the beauty industry provides a snapshot of the century-long ambivalences surrounding feminist appearances, meanings of feminism in relation to
beauty, and the challenges evident in the production of problematic meanings of feminism and beauty in the media -- even those created by feminists. The next chapter continues the analysis by exploring contemporary entanglements of postfeminism and media in early twentieth-first century consumer culture.
CHAPTER 3: THREE CASES OF POSTFEMINIST SELF-BRANDING: KATE MOSS, TYRA BANKS AND AMERICA'S NEXT TOP MODEL, AND THE DOVE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL BEAUTY

This chapter explores postfeminist self-branding as a central process by which women's negotiation of beauty is presented to audiences in contemporary consumer culture. By focusing on three cases of postfeminist embodiment -- "rexy," "fierce," and "real beauty" -- I demonstrate the ways in which efforts at "empowerment" support neoliberal values for women's body labor and attitudes about it. These analyses of two supermodels and their brands alongside a personal care brand's marketing campaign highlight economic empowerment as a subjective quality of neoliberalism.

The technique of postfeminist self-branding goes beyond the media producer of old: it adds celebrity and reality, highlighting the relationship between the ordinary and extraordinary (particularly in terms of the popularization of the entrepreneur). It also signifies an increasing distance from esteemed feminist cultural critic bell hooks' conception of feminism: "Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression… feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into" (2000, 26).

A Tale of Two Supermodels

This section explores two supermodels that have developed profitable brands after their modeling careers. They communicate distinct values of beauty ("rexy," "fierce") as aspirational self-descriptors. The meanings and practices that correspond with each are discussed next.

Kate Moss and "Rexy"

Kate Moss was a British teenager when she took the global fashion stage by storm as Calvin Klein's ingénue. In a series of advertisements, she was presented as "the perfect
incantation of the child-woman" (Wood 2003, 12), an enticing yet unavailable Lolita with wide eyes and a seemingly pre-pubescent body. Her painfully thin body was catapulted into the limelight in a controversial 1993 Calvin Klein image (Fig. 11), in which she was draped over a couch whose seeming heaviness contrasts with the weight of her body. The positioning and cropping of the image makes her legs and arms appear amputated, leaving her body immobile and inescapably accessible to the viewer's gaze. Moss' facial expression and her draped torso offer her viewers a tabula rasa on which to project their interpretations and desires.

Media critic Jean Kilbourne described Moss as a disempowered subject in this image: "vulnerable, abused, and exploited...she is lying nude on her stomach, pliant, available, androgynous enough to appeal to all kinds of pedophiles" (2000, 283). Kilbourne's description of Moss as androgynous is further supported by the model's seemingly cropped hair and lack of breasts or curves. Third Wave feminists might consider Moss' body as empowered, interpreting it as "resistance to a binary conception of gender" (Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein 2001, 201). On the other hand, media theorists Helene A. Shugart, Catherine Egley Waggoner, and D. Lynn O’Brien Hallstein posit that the androgynous figure "privileges male qualities and characteristics because it is a ‘boyish ideal’ that suggests strength and leanness and also requires obsessive dieting, exercising, and/or bulimic and anorexic practices for women to achieve…[it] is problematic because it symbolically and literally denies real women’s bodies and the markers of female reproductive capabilities – breasts and hips" (2001, 202-203). Moss’ body, whether interpreted as anorexic or androgynous, has been a site of gender and social debates for fifteen years, in both the popular press and scholarly tomes. Frequently
nude and posed in sexual postures, the iconic fashion model became an object to be viewed repeatedly by popular audiences.

While Moss has experienced much commercial success and cultural power as a celebrity, she has also "sparked considerable public discussion on the basis of gender in terms of her function as a role model for young women" (Shugart, Waggoner, and Hallstein 2001, 201). Moss' extremely thin physique was credited with stimulating a waifish, drug-addicted aesthetic (called "heroin chic"), thus "modeling a particularly damaging body image for young women" (ibid) that has been credited as a factor in the contemporary cultural crisis of eating disorders (Lague 1993). At 30 percent below the ideal weight for her height (Shiel 2012), Moss' body mass index meets the criteria for anorexia. Perhaps not surprisingly, she has been credited with creating an aspirational aesthetic ideal for anorexics, who celebrate her photographs as 'thinspiration' (Krupnick 2012) (see case study on wannarexics in Chapter 4). In this regard, individuals may internalize the cultural demands to be thin as part of a "tyranny of slenderness" (Chernin 1981) wherein female celebrity bodies serve as a site for audience emulation. In particular, Moss' aesthetic has been acknowledged as a powerful blueprint for female anorexics but also for women in general, a point illustrated by newspaper headlines such as the Daily Mail's "One Minute of Moss Makes Women Unhappy with Their Bodies" (Hope 2014).

Moss attached a different label to her aesthetic: "rexy," a neologism combining anorexic and sexy, which she and her fashion industry friends think of as "a compliment" (Nicholl 2007). Moss thus projects her own conception of her body to audiences: that an eating disordered, drug ravaged appearance is sexy. Because of her role as a celebrity
with immense cultural power, she is able to popularize her "rexy" viewpoint. For instance, when asked in an interview about one of her favorite mottos, she replied with the anorexics' slogan, "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels;" concerned about these messages, some global media outlets have criticized Moss for "encouraging young girls to starve themselves" (Nathan 2009). Susan Ringwood, chief executive of the UK eating disorder organization, Beat, acknowledged the potential impact of her cultural power on audiences: "We know she [Moss] is a person who young people look up to, she's such a style icon, they are very interested in her life, they follow all the details of it. So for her to even inadvertently legitimize something that could be potentially so harmful is regrettable" (Nathan 2009).

Celebrity culture is now a principal vehicle for media discourse about women's body image (Holmes and Negra 2011). As a channel for the dissemination of ideological and hegemonic messages "about gender, race, class and sexuality" (Holmes and Redmond 2006, 124), it communicates what socially acceptable beauty and sexuality look and act like, thus representing the cultural norm of femininity that women and girls aspire to have in order to be (Bordo 1993).

As a case study of postfeminist self-branding, Moss's "rexy" aesthetic exemplifies the contemporary conception of desirable female bodies by intertwining cultural norms of femininity and commodification. Moss' celebrity image – accessed through advertisements, magazines, newspapers, television features, and websites – in which the poses are often nearly nude and suggestively sexual, conveys meanings about the mass and luxury beauty brands that she represents. Her body as a vehicle for such meanings is reinforced through media coverage of her fashion choices. In 2005, sales of the Hunter
Boots Company skyrocketed after Moss wore their goods to a music festival (Lester 2009). Fashion publications and bloggers subsequently identified "The Kate Moss Effect," acknowledging that her style is widely emulated by women.

Meanings of "rexy" also correspond with a glamorous celebrity lifestyle, which has shifted from secrecy to controversy. The twentieth century image of Moss captured an aura of mystery, which was generally interpreted as positive. She rarely agreed to interviews, and little was known about her private life, with the exception of her long-term relationships with photographer Mario Sorrenti and actor Johnny Depp. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, however, Moss’ persona became charged with a negative tone when her private life became tabloid fodder. In 2002, she gave birth, though unwed, to a daughter, Lila Grace. Soon after, she began dating musicians with a penchant for drug use. Vogue writer Plum Sykes described Moss’ high-profile relationship with rocker Pete Doherty "as a Mick Jagger-Marianne Faithfull-style sex, drugs, and rock-‘n’-roll romance" (Sykes 2008). In September 2005, the British newspaper The Daily Mirror ran photographs and an article about Moss with the title, "Cocaine Kate: Supermodel Kate Moss Snorts Line After Line;" from this, she earned the media moniker, "Cokate." The Daily Mirror quoted an anonymous colleague about Moss’ drug consumption: "We were at a party at a lovely flat by the Thames. Kate used a credit card to cut up the powder, then hoovered hers up first. She was quite greedy" (Kaulingfreks and Bos 2007, 204-305). Moss’ drug and sexual behavior suggests that she enjoyed excessive, hedonistic pleasure as a part of her corporeal experience. Although she still rarely gives interviews, her actions shattered the positive aura of mystery she had previously established for public consumption.
Understanding the Meanings of "Rexy" through Artistic Texts

In visual culture, fashion and the bodies that wear it offer a system of meaning to audiences. Moss has been consistently present in fashion images that circulate as part of visual culture -- imagery that "engage[s] with and tap[s] into female desire" (McRobbie 2008, 109) -- for almost two decades. As an image creator, contemporary British artist Marc Quinn picked up on the cultural meanings of Moss' body in his renderings of her. Quinn's choice of Moss as a subject reflects the view of writer and historian Sir Roy Strong that "in our age, fashion models have become the icons of beauty to be aspired to….Perhaps Kate Moss is more of an anorexic Aphrodite of our time" (Taher 2006). Quinn embraces this notion, calling Moss "a knotted Venus of our age" (Higgins 2006).

Artistic representations of Moss created in the 2000s and widely exhibited in prestigious artistic spaces offer a site for understanding the various meanings of "rexy" and the model's value as an evocative image for social commentary. The most important of the images that immortalize Moss' aesthetic were created by Quinn. He recognized that, in contemporary Western culture, Moss had become an icon; that is, she is "an image that refers to something outside of its individual components, something (or someone) that has great symbolic meaning for many people" (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 36). Quinn studied history and art history at Cambridge University and emerged on the London art scene in the 1990s as part of the Young British Artists collective (aka BYAs or Britart), a group of conceptual artists who "spoke of their work in terms of 'irony' and 'democracy of meaning,' placing ordinary or everyday items in a context of beauty" (Heard 2004).

Quinn captured Moss' iconic power and the ways it relates to contemporary
cultural values of female beauty in several sculptures that render Moss as the goddess Venus. From the perspective of this case study, however, Moss represents an icon of "postfeminist disorder" (per McRobbie 2008), symbolizing conflicting values of beauty and sexuality in the current socio-historical context. Moss' "rexy" body plays with notions of indulgence and discipline, and the blurred interconnections between the two underlie her aesthetic and celebrity status. These "knotted" postfeminist notions of femininity - portrayed as the struggle between indulgence and discipline – are related to the production (through diet/drugs) and presentation (as sexuality) of women's bodies and identities. They also relate to themes of power, empowerment, control, ambivalence, and individuality. Quinn's depictions thus lend themselves to an interpretation of the cultural conflicts that surround the pursuit and embodiment of femininity in our contemporary age.

Statue 1: Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment)

In his 2007 Sphinx series, which was displayed at New York City's Mary Boone Gallery, Quinn interpreted Moss as an updated version of the ancient Greek figure of the Sphinx; for him, Moss was a "mystery. There must be something about her that has clicked with the collective unconscious to make her so ubiquitous, so spirit of the age" (Higgins 2006). The title of the series seems to suggest her celebrity persona, as sphinx means "an enigmatic or mysterious person" ("Sphinx" 2014), or someone we know little about. While Moss did not comment publicly on the statues, in which she is represented in various yoga poses, according to Quinn, she reacted positively to the design of the series. He reported that she "came round to the studio and looked at some drawings. She got it immediately and was really excited about it" (Higgins 2006). Moss' response to the
final sculptures, according to the artist, was positive as well. He stated, "'When I showed Kate...she told me she loved it [the Sphinx series]....Kate thinks it [the sculptures] lifts her to a mythic level'" (Staff 2008a).

Moss did not, however, pose for the sculptures in the Sphinx series. Instead, her measurements were taken, casts were made, numerous drawings were rendered, and photographs were shot of her body. Then, Quinn "'found a person who could do the yoga pose...we sculpted Kate's body in the pose; this is her body and her proportions'" (Higgins 2006). Upon their unveiling, the poses aroused controversy "because Moss doesn't do yoga...nor does she lead a very yogic lifestyle" (Ricci 2011). These figures were also at the center of debate for again fostering the sense of unattainable longing for a body like Moss'. One yoga practitioner wrote about the statues, "How many of you look at images of poses and try to physically emulate these ideals? Even as you strive towards healthy living, the twist is that perhaps these ideals amount to an unhealthy rat race...we measure our self-worth against the manufactured specters that are not real. Kate never did that pose" (Antonopoulos 2006).

In the sculpture titled Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment) (Fig. 12), Moss' limbs appear skeletal, hands pointing to a concave stomach, with an apparent exoskeleton running from her chin to her ribcage. A lined fabric cloaks her body, highlighting Moss' corporeality in a depiction that gives a sense of only bones and veins. The garment slips down around her lower arms, falling onto legs positioned in a lotus meditation posture. The placement of the garment further emphasizes her concave abdomen.

This representation has a strong visual parallel with the classical Eastern spiritual image known as the Fasting Buddha (Fig. 13). The similarity suggests an association
between Moss and Siddhartha, an Indian prince who meditated under the Bodhi tree until he received enlightenment about the meaning of human suffering. Quinn's placement of Moss in this meditative position might speak to his subject's recent attachment to the Buddhist religion. She turned to the belief system after her 2005 drug scandal involving the now infamous *Daily Mirror* photographs that showed Moss cutting and snorting cocaine and seemed to confirm long-standing rumors of drug use. In this piece, Quinn reflects denotations of Moss's body as an index of aberrant self-discipline (anorexia) and hedonistic self-indulgence (drugs), where Moss's body signals her - and perhaps our own (as individuals and a culture) - fallibility:

> The body that is appealing to designers - and thus to consumers - is a body that looks like it has been ravaged by drugs […] Whether it's cocaine or speed or heroin or caffeine or cigarettes or anorexia or bulimia or some combination of the above, most adult women cannot get bodies that look like Moss's healthily, because hers is not a healthy body. (Traister 2005)

Quinn's sculpture further suggests a dichotomy between the Western (secular) and Eastern (spiritual) practice of yoga. Unlike the Fasting Buddha, Moss' head does not emerge from a halo and her facial features and body are not as sunken. Moreover, while the emaciation of her body mirrors that of the Fasting Buddha, it has not been shaped by monastic asceticism and, unlike Buddha, she is not a figure who seeks to understand how human suffering can be alleviated. Rather, Moss' emaciated figure brought her celebrity power and entry into a lifestyle defined by bodily pleasures. Moreover, for others, Moss' beauty likely contributed to or reinforced eating disorders, disordered eating, and/or body image issues among women, which, in turn, has inflicted pain on them and others around them. In *Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment)*, her body thus symbolizes the troubling cultural practice of (consciously or unconsciously) self-imposed suffering to attain the dominant
ideology of beauty. Moss then signifies the illusory benefits and self-destructive consequences of attachment to her image as an attainable materiality. In this way, Moss' body could be a site for worship by pro-anorexics as part their worship of "ana" (anorexia).

Statue 2: Siren

Quinn selected one of his figures from the Sphinx series and rendered it in gold for the 2008-09 Statuephilia exhibition at The British Museum. As Quinn notes, Siren (Fig. 14) is "the largest gold statue since [...] antiquity and probably ever. It's 50 kilos, which doesn't sound like much, but in fact in a cast statue that is a lot" ("Statuephilia Leaflet" 2008). The sculpture weighs 110 pounds, approximately the same as Moss' stated weight (she is reportedly 105 pounds and 5'7'') and as a consequence, in Siren, Moss is literally worth her weight in gold. In view of Quinn's anticipation that Siren could sell for $2.8 million, it appears that he, like Calvin Klein, commodified Moss' body for financial gain. Furthermore, as gold has retained its value across extended periods in Western civilization, even if/when Moss's cultural value fades, her financial value for Quinn will not.

Siren presents to the viewer a life-sized Moss in a tangled position. One could draw an invisible line from her face to her breasts to her genital area, which is highlighted by the texture and metallic reflection of her bikini/leotard. Her head is surrounded by a gaggle of wing-like arms and legs, and her face is framed by flowing hair.

Siren's positioning creates an appearance of an excess of limbs, "like a version, Quinn suggested, of the multi-limbed Hindu deity, Shiva" (Higgins 2006). In Eastern mythology, Shiva is portrayed in two iconic ways: as a Master Yogi (in the meditating
Lotus pose) and as the Dancing Shiva (portrayed with multiple arms; see Fig. 15). *Siren* clearly associates Moss with the Dancing Shiva, who "represents both the destruction and the creation of the universe and reveals the cycles of death, birth, and rebirth" (Gruenwald and Marchand n.d.). The Dancing Shiva "image is paradoxical, uniting the inner tranquility, and outside activity of Shiva" (Das 2014). Shiva and his consort, Shakti, represent divine sensuality, cosmic union, and spiritual harmony. Quinn's presentation of Moss as Shiva, a male god, suggests her god-like status in contemporary patriarchal culture. Yet, in her position of power as a female celebrity, she represents neither tranquility nor enlightenment, but rather conflicting messages of femininity that emphasize hyper-sexual activity – the sculpture therefore functions as an ironic commentary on current cultural values. Quinn's immortalization of Moss as an object whose genitals are offered for viewers to gaze upon and fantasize about suggests that she epitomizes human attachment to sexual desire. *Siren* implicitly contrasts the tantric sensuality and divine union of the East with what might be seen as Western culture's one-dimensional sexualization of the female body.

The implied dialectic between depth and superficiality, and between union and objectification, supports one interpretation of Moss as "knotted." Another compelling reading comes from Quinn's statement that "To put her in this yoga pose was a bit like a knot. I don't really know what it means, but it means something that collectively we've all decided it means" (Higgins 2006). While Quinn suggests that he is simply playing with signs, *Siren* can be read as representing "knotted" postfeminist meanings of femininity: a woman who presents her body in a sexual manner intended to lure the attention of corporations and consumers, whose approval assures her continued self-objectification.
and success as a cultural product. Moss as a Western cultural symbol reflects the underlying binary of male/female power relations that form the socio-economic structure, which, in turn, support her status as an iconic beauty.

Quinn's sculptures update the myth of the *Siren* in a way that makes it culturally relevant. His renditions suggest that Moss seduces the audience by the allure of an emaciated, sexualized body. Importantly, this contemporary siren tempts women more than men, as it is women who are drawn to her body. Their pursuit to emulate it as well as support its version of beauty may lead to the destruction of their own bodies as well as their self-esteem in order to achieve social acceptability or celebrity. As a consequence, they do not pursue their own autonomous sense of power about their bodies or realize their voice in the public sphere. In 2002, Quinn created a life-size ice sculpture of Moss titled *Beauty*, which bears on this point. Moss was clothed in a cape by fashion designer Alexander McQueen, and the work was encased in a refrigerator that "dominate[d] the room, its thermostatically controlled system intermittently crashing and humming into action, the ice gradually melting to be released as vapor into the air that visitors breathe" (Wildgoose 2002, 1353). *Beauty* slowly melted over a three-month period, and Quinn offered his interpretation of its symbolism regarding Moss: "It's a perfect metaphor for our consumption of your beauty – as the ice evaporates, it will be released as vapor into the art gallery, and people will breathe you in. There's something so Eucharistic about it" (Taher 2006). Quinn's comment suggests that, for him, individuals absorb Moss on more than visual and psychological levels: as a body signifying cultural values, they consume her in a visceral (and, perhaps mythical or ritualistic) way.
"Rexy:" A Value Signifying "Postfeminist Disorder"

Kate Moss' status as a beauty icon who has attained wealth and influence due to her self-branded "rexy" image combined with her appearance in Quinn's sculptures situate her as a cultural agent of "postfeminist disorder." Conceptualized by feminist media studies scholar Angela McRobbie, postfeminist disorder supports women's interest in femininity over feminism, promoting realization of a desirable body over a voice that effects social change. Moss' celebrity body circulates messages of "unhealthy femininity" (McRobbie 2008, 96) through her promotion of "rexy," which she presents as a desirable cultural value that associates power (not problems) with the ultra-thin female body.

Quinn's references to Eastern mythic figures in his sculptural renderings communicates "rexy" as a binary of indulgence and discipline related to female body labor. Extending this message, I contend that Moss' aesthetic value signifies a pressing cultural conflict: that the pursuit of the dominant ideology of beauty is about more than shaping a body. It is an emotional struggle that weighs heavily on women and girls. As the ideal of hegemonic femininity, Moss suggests that eating disorders and drug use, among other conditions, remain issues that require feminist intervention and that women's anxieties about their failure to adhere to the ideal are literally inscribed onto women's bodies.

These depictions of Moss also situate her within a postfeminist presentation of the sexualized female body. As the visual semblance of the Fasting Buddha in Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment), Moss' emaciated body is self-contained, with the arms and legs folding inward. Swaths of fabric cover the genital area, the breasts (or the lack thereof) appear constricted as if by breastplate armor, and the facial expression seems perpetually
impassive. These features invite the viewer to meditate on Moss' inner states of being or on the cultural meaning of an emaciated body as desirable. By contrast, the Siren exudes sexuality, thrusting genitals and breasts at the viewer for his or her investigative gaze. Its seductive corporeality invites audiences to engage with Moss' body, which, as portrayed by Quinn, symbolizes the postfeminist value of "empowered" choice to objectify one's own body.

Postfeminist messages about the female body thus advocate "rexy" as a desirable path to "enlightenment," even though this path can be mentally and physically damaging. This value associates female power with an unhealthily thin body and hypersexual self-presentation. As a celebrity with the influence to shape and reflect cultural beliefs, Moss disseminates and validates such views and behaviors rather than striving to accomplish feminist aims. That is, audiences often repeat her reported belief that women will benefit financially and socially if they view their bodies as an object to be commodified for the pleasure of others. Whether women do so by pursuing a career as a fashion model or by striving in their daily lives to be an exemplar of "rexy," they align with Moss' attitudes and, therefore, more broadly, with postfeminist discourse, which binds not only cultural but also personal meanings of the body to self-subjectification. Quinn's elevation of Moss to mythic status, albeit as a "knotted Venus of our age" (Higgins 2006), further complicates the meaning of "rexy" beauty for female audiences. By immortalizing her aesthetic as a cultural value, Quinn embeds her ability to manufacture and sell an image as a positive means to achieve celebrity status and success.

**Tyra Banks, America's Next Top Model, and "Fierce"**

In the 1990s, Tyra Banks achieved fame in popular culture as the first African
American fashion model to appear on the cover of coveted mass distribution magazines: *GQ*, the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue*, and the *Victoria's Secret* catalog. In 2003, she founded Bankable Productions, which develops beauty-centered reality television programs (*America's Next Top Model*, *Stylista*, and *True Beauty*), her eponymous talk show, and movies for female audiences. Bankable's most enduring program has been *America's Next Top Model (ANTM).*

Although *The Tyra Banks Show*, which aired between 2005 and 2010, won two Daytime Emmy awards in the new category of "informative program" in 2008 and 2009 (Hinckley 2009), Banks stopped producing the program because of consistently low ratings (Adalian 2009). ANTM faced no such problems.

Banks' celebrity image shifted from being primarily a supermodel to that of a television producer whose shows both enhance her celebrity and develop selected groups of young women as aspiring models-celebrities. Banks explained this move in a *Newsweek* profile as follows: "I've had my glory in the modeling world. I want to use the power I have now to cultivate new talent in front of the camera and behind the scenes" (Staff 2008b).

Banks' stated desire to empower women has been a lucrative message for her brand, increasing both her financial and cultural capital. In 2006, *Time Magazine* described Banks as a "Supermogul with a Business Model" and included her on their list of "100 People Who Shape Our World." Also in 2006, *Forbes Magazine* placed Banks on their annual list of "The World's Most Powerful Celebrities" with a "power ranking" of 84; this ranking system is based on a combination of celebrity status and financial

---

5 *Stylista* ran for one season in 2008. *True Beauty* was cancelled in 2010 after two seasons.
success. Banks' ranking on the Forbes list rose to 61 in 2007 before falling to 68 in 2008, and she has not been placed on the list since (Miller 2008). However, Banks' financial power has remained steady. In 2008 and 2009, Banks' estimated earnings of $23 million and $30 million, respectively, placed her at the top of the Forbes list of "Primetime TV Top-Earning Women;" she was number 2 on that list in 2010, with estimated earnings of $25 million (Rose 2010).

Banks has expressed a desire for even more financial and cultural capital in order to realize positive social change similar to her professed role model, female media mogul and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey. In an interview with The New York Times Magazine, Banks stated: "I want power…The power to make change" (Hirschberg 2008). She has also said that she envisions herself as a "Gen-X Oprah" and wants "an empire like Oprah's" (Chase 2006, 62). Popular publications, such as Entertainment Weekly, noticed and declared on the cover of a February 2008 edition: "Tyra Inc: She's Building an Empire. Just Don't Call her Oprah Jr."

Banks' media mogul status can be understood as the embodiment of the vexed legacy of early twentieth century feminist media makers. English professor and feminist scholar Mary Thompson draws a comparison between Banks and African American entrepreneur and philanthropist Madame C.J. Walker, who built an empire by creating and selling beauty products specifically for black women. Thompson contends that Banks' narrative in ANTM draws on Walker's, writing, "Part narrative of development, part contemporary retelling of the life of Madame C.J. Walker, Banks’s (relative) rags-to-riches story is held up to ANTM contestants as their guide, and it works as the underlying archetypal storyline for the editing of the show" (2010, 336). However, as consumer
culture scholar Juliann Sivulka highlights in *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising*, the racial context of pre-civil rights America meant that for black manufacturers like Walker, their business remained focused on the smaller market of black consumers (2011, 142). Banks, by contrast, is a mogul in a postfeminist, postrace epoch (Joseph 2009) reaching a wide range of audiences/consumers with her brand messages.

*Banks' Brand and America's Next Top Model*

Banks' brand and celebrity are closely linked with *America's Next Top Model*, on which Banks serves as creator, executive producer, host, and judge. *ANTM*, Bankable's first and most successful program, was a breakout hit for United Paramount Network (UPN) when it premiered in 2003. When UPN merged with the WB Television Network to form the CW Television Network (hereafter the CW) in 2006, *ANTM* became the highest rated series for the new network's 2006-2007 launch season. The show enjoyed a consistent viewership from 2004 through 2007, but since then, ratings have steadily dropped. However, despite the decline, the show was renewed for seasons 17 and 18 because it is relatively inexpensive to produce and retains strong viewing averages among women aged between 18 and 34 years, a coveted demographic for advertisers ("The War of 18-49, America’s Next Top Model" 2010; Gorman 2011). The global franchise, *Top Model*, is licensed in 170 countries; additionally, approximately 50 national versions of *Top Model* are airing in a variety of cultural contexts around the world.

On *ANTM*, young women compete for the title of "America's Next Top Model" and a chance to realize their dream of becoming working A-list models and achieving wealth and celebrity, just like Banks. A central theme across *ANTM*'s seasons is
transformation, of both the contestants and their lives, because the show positions itself as "a life-changing opportunity" (1,1). The show presents Banks as someone whose knowledge and experience as a successful supermodel qualifies her to support and guide contestants toward making their dream come true. Reliably each season, the contestants emphasize their good fortune in being selected from among thousands of applicants in order to have access to Banks and her team of experts and achieve the ultimate prize of stardom. Banks affirms ANTM's value as follows: "Our finalists have blasted into success, on the runway, in magazines, on television, and in every fashion capital on the globe" (7,1). Further, she states that she has the ability to turn at least one of these women into a star as long as the women meet the requirements needed to succeed:

I want to make a Top Model in eight weeks. I want to take someone from obscurity to fame and I want to chart the entire process and show America how it happens…Some of these girls you would not look at twice in the streets. But I'll know when I can make them into something…What I'm looking is for a star – that's all. (1,1)

America's Next Top Model is about dreams, plain and simple. And it's about accomplishing these dreams through hard work, talent, and passion. I worked my butt off to get to the top of the modeling industry so I know exactly what it takes to make a star. (2,1)

These ideas set the tone for ANTM, in which the narratives of ten to fourteen women unfold while they live together and participate in challenges (photographs, commercials, and so forth) that are the basis for elimination by a panel of judges (including Banks). The eliminations are based on the contestants' performance in photographic, runway, and television challenges that test the contestants' ability to remain photogenic under difficult conditions (for example, contestants have modeled with spiders on their faces and in wind tunnels). Contestants must excel at representing the uniqueness of their own beauty and personality in their photographs, as potential
spokeswomen, and through their runway walks in a manner that meets the judges' approval. The winner of each season achieves the promised, albeit often temporary, dream of becoming an A-list fashion model via a contract with a mass cosmetics company, representation by a prestigious modeling agency, and a spread in a popular women's magazine. The prize over the seasons of the show has remained the same, although the awarding companies have changed. Modeling contracts have been signed with cosmetics giants such as Revlon, Sephora, or Cover Girl, modeling agencies such as Wilhelmina, IMG, Ford, and Elite have represented the contestants, and women's magazines such as Marie Claire, Jane, Elle, ElleGirl, Seventeen, and Italian Vogue have featured them.

It is clear that becoming "fierce" is the mantra of transformation that Banks teaches to her contestants; being a "fierce" self-brander involves immaterial/affective labor to improve their bodies and attitudes, labor that occurs amid postfeminist messages of "empowerment." Many of the contestants narrate painful stories of impoverishment, disadvantage, and low self-esteem. Especially for them, participation on ANTM is offered as an opportunity to become empowered and, thus, improve their self-esteem; that is, in the process of working toward the prize that will realize their dream, they will transform their identities and leave their difficulties behind. This analysis looks across sixteen seasons (2003-2011) of ANTM to unpack the ways in which the textual messages facilitate the self-branding of Banks' contestants as "fierce" neoliberal citizens, a practice that signals a move from being ordinary to extraordinary (supermodel) people.
Laboring for a "Fierce" Self

"Fierce" is the label promoted by Banks to identify the value of her Bankable brand, and one that contestants and users incorporate into their language and strive to achieve through their immaterial and affective labor. As they work on their bodies and attitudes, the contestants produce "fierce" as part of their self-branding process so that they can symbolically attach themselves to Banks' professional success.

Philosopher Michel Foucault proposes that the body functions as a medium through which discourse operates as social control to create and regulate it as docile. Foucauldian feminist Susan Bordo describes such bodies as "habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, [and] ‘improvement'" (1993, 166). To understand how women's labor produces meanings of "fierce," I apply Foucauldian feminist Sandra Bartky's (1990) delineation of disciplinary practices of hegemonic femininity. She argues that such practices produce docile bodies, demonstrated by posture, movement, dieting and exercise, attitude towards the body, and ornamentation. I also take Gill's (2007) breakdown of postfeminist tenets to show how the contestants' labor corresponds with neoliberal attitudes and practices (described in Chapter 1).

ANTM's neoliberal logic incites the aspiring model's acceptance of and labor in Banks' disciplinary practices, which afford contestants knowledge of and practice in executing "fierce" transformations. Media and gender studies scholars have interpreted Banks as a postfeminist media figure (Joseph 2009) and ANTMO as stressing postfeminist values (Joseph 2009; Thompson 2010; Press 2011). In addition ANTM's narrative motivates women to attain "fierce" through a process that entails self-monitoring practices of hegemonic femininity and communication of a postfeminist desire for self-
transformation. Along these lines, Banks' discourse "encourages the [ANTM] women to envision themselves as 'CEO of Me'…which means seeing oneself as a branded commodity that requires perpetual reinvention" (Ouellette and Hay 2008, 133). Banks encourages contestants to engage in unending work on the self through disciplinary practices; in doing so, the women situate themselves as commodities that are integral to her brand communication.

This analysis examines Banks' messaging of "fierce" as emphasizing the ultimate brand attachment, that is, self-branding. Self-branding centers on transformation that rests on the insecurity of the subjects; Hearn has discussed self-branding practices in reality television, arguing that such programs "mine the expressed psychological insecurity of their nearly always female participants for narrative fodder as they work to produce the self-brands ostensibly required to secure a job…[at the show's end] the participant claims that she…has conquered her fears and insecurity, and has…[found] a way to express her new-found sense of self" (2008a, 499-500). Being "fierce" signifies that the ANTM contestants have actively interiorized the Banks-created identity for the "made-over participant…[who is] a bankable, standardized female brand" (Hearn 2008a, 502). While the conventional meaning of the word "fierce" is behaviorally oriented ("furiously active or determined," according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary [2013]), it is notable that in The Urban Dictionary, a reference for slang terms employed in popular culture, the definition conveys an emotional attitude and an indebtedness to Banks: "A term coined by Ms. Tyra Banks, that means…great, strong, or the BOMB" ("Fierce" 2014). I consider how ANTM contestants interpret and internalize meanings of "fierce" in the process of self-branding to reap the rewards of being "America's Next Top Model."
"Fierce" beautification of the body is a central element in *ANTM*, spearheaded by the "Ty-over." Each cycle, contestants are given a new appearance through changes in hair (extensions, cut, dye) and makeup. The women are required to maintain and upkeep their Ty-overs throughout the competition. Week after week, they pay close attention to their hair care, cosmetics application, nail care, and skin care. Moreover, they adhere to the beauty standard of "hairless, and smooth" (Bartky 1990, 69) that was established in *ANTM*’s first episode requiring bikini waxes; waxing or tweezing is portrayed on eyebrows, underarms, and legs. To become fierce involves breaking down the pre-*ANTM* self and handing oneself over to the experts. The Ty-over, however, is challenging for many contestants, as it requires them to give over control of their appearance to Banks. Emotional meltdowns are common, and Banks' aides-de-camp Mister Jay (the creative director of the photo shoots and sometime judge) and Miss J (a runway coach and sometime judge) persuade the contestants to conform to the Ty-over to be "fierce." These judges were involved in Banks' modeling career: Miss J had been Banks' runway coach and Mister Jay has been her makeup artist. If a contestant resists this shaping of subjectivity, her resistance is brought up as a problem at the judging table, where each season Banks sits as the mediator of commentary and the deciding judge. The Ty-over produces an identifiable Bankable commodity complicit with beauty industry archetypes -- "girl next door," "bombshell," "edgy," "couture" -- that reinforce gender stereotypes based on "attitude and demeanor" (16, 6).

Contestants regularly talk about disciplining their bodies through exercise regimes and food intake, and how these practices sometimes lead to physical and/or psychological problems. London recovered from bulimia before *ANTM*, and, while on the show, gained
fifteen pounds because she stopped purging. Mister Jay called her weight gain "unprofessional," as preserving one's size is a modeling requirement, and Miss J asked her how much weight she had gained. Banks evaded the issue by eliminating London for being unphotogenic (12, 9). This handling exposes the hypocrisy behind "fierce," namely, that being "fierce," despite assertions to the contrary, cannot exist if one is significantly different from the hegemonic standard: ANTM has had only a handful of plus-size contestants (of whom only one has won the title), one season of contestants 5'7" and under, and its eligibility requirements stipulate that the contestants be young (in their late teens and early twenties). While there have been contestants of color, the program's postracial narrative complicates the meanings of this visible appearance of diversity.

Contestants also become "fierce" by performing hegemonic femininity through their movement. Miss J demonstrates a "fierce" runway walk connoting femininity through poise, walking in high heels, and precise micro-movements, and also critiques the strengths and weaknesses in contestants' walks. Miss J thus indoctrinates women to perform gender identity through "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (Butler 1989, 33). The contestants' language and affect reflect their understanding of Miss J's "fierce" movement training; as Danielle said self-assuredly, "I'm giving them [the judges] my fiercest walk" (6, 13). The runway walk is presented for critique at judgings, and season finales feature "walk-offs," suggesting that it factors into the judges' choice of the winner. It is also assessed in "go-sees," where the contestants meet with designers, who tell Banks whether they would hire them based on their runway walk, portfolios, and "personality." As Banks advises the contestants, there is a practical link between posing in photos and runway walks based on
consumerism: "You need to get to that end of that runway and pose for three seconds so those photographers can get that shot of those clothes, but it's also so you can work your fierceness" (10, 6).

"Fierce" also means expressing pleasure and empowerment through sexual movements. Contestants commonly pose in degrees of nudity by themselves or with other models (male and/or female) in close proximity. Their comments in these situations suggest that "fierce" supports subjectification as the empowered choice for sexual expression. For instance, when modeling clothing in Amsterdam's Red Light District, Sam commented, "we're going to sell the clothes instead of selling…bodies, and I felt so good about it" (11, 10). In a different challenge, Adrienne noted, "I can be a sex machine in a lot of my pictures…I'm really proud that I can be that woman" (1, 9). When contestants struggle to control their emotions in order to convey the postfeminist values judges desire, it means that they are not "fierce" enough; for example, when Jane struggled to express passion with a male model, Barker chided her, "I still need to see more out of you. I mean, I'm getting the poses and the look, but…I'm not feeling the lust" (15, 10).

A major component in ANTM's structure is the background story of each contestant and how she feels about other contestants, the challenges, and the judging process. This communication is relayed to the audience using several devices, such as hidden cameras that record the women in the house where they live, where they go for work or entertainment, and in a confession booth or by the judges' direct inquiry into their feelings about what happened over the week they are being evaluated. The participants accept this close scrutiny and Banks' editing of these raw materials for public
presentation as a requirement for being on the show and as a vehicle for feedback and self-improvement. Indeed, "Contestants often define the resistance to transformation as a character defect…. 'Not opening up' is a flaw that will get contestants on *America's Next Top Model* eliminated" (Bratich 2007, 9-10).

*Assessing "Fierce:" Transformation, Self-Esteem, and Future Success*

The editing for *ANTM* creates a narrative of change from insecure to "fierce," and thus relates a story of emotional transformation that can be understood as a technology of the self. In this sense, developing and communicating a "fierce" persona functions as a neoliberal training in self-esteem for the contestants. Bringing the audience to awareness about the contestants' transformation requires that their self-evaluations and the judges' assessments of them be highlighted. The experts include both those whose job it is to train the women and those whose job it is to judge their performance and its relation to being hired as a fashion model to sell beauty products.

The neoliberal training on *ANTM* suggests that showing vulnerability is a virtue. Highlighting their difficult lives and intense desire for a better future, contestants present themselves as willing and pliable subjects who feel indebted for the opportunity given them by Banks. They show appreciation to her, regardless of how difficult or endless the process feels, as they continuously labor for her approval rather than their own sense of agency. In this dynamic, women work to be "fierce" because it means personal and financial success. Ultimately, however, the process denies a sense of agency while they accrue more power for Banks.

*ANTM* thus advocates postfeminist messages about the "fierce" body as a desirable path to a career, celebrity, and brand. It associates meanings of female power
and improved self-esteem with a body that requires constant self-discipline and attention. Banks and *ANTM* disseminate these beliefs and support postfeminist values rather than subverting them. The affect of fierce, produced via postfeminist self-branding, demands women's engagement in immaterial/affective labor on their bodies and attitudes as a route to a positive sense of self and a successful career. Banks' cultural and financial power suggests that this path offers benefits to all those who follow it, a logic that fuels the view that women should value their bodies as their primary means to fulfillment, allowing themselves to be commodified for others' profit. By aligning with "fierce" as a value, women (on the show and, potentially, in the audience) accept work on the self as an empowered practice for their future desirability to others.

*(Post)feminist Activism via a Beauty Brand*

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (CRFB) also sought to address the problematics around dominant conceptions of beauty by encouraging its audience to bond ideologically and materially with its brand. A decade ago, the Unilever Corporation reassessed its marketing strategy for Dove, its brand of personal care products. In so doing, it advanced a strategy to create a global image and heighten customer loyalty to Dove around the world.

CFRB was based on a 2003 report, "The Real Truth About Beauty." The study involved 3200 women, ages eighteen through sixty-four, in ten countries, in a twenty to twenty-five-minute telephone interview. The researchers found that less than 2 percent of women felt beautiful; 75 percent wanted representations of women to reflect diversity through age, shape, and size; and 76 percent wanted the media to portray beauty as more than physical (Etcoff et al. 2004). According to Alessandro Manfredi, Dove's Global
Brand Director, the women's responses suggested a market for a new philosophy of beauty that provided Unilever with "a great opportunity to differentiate the[ir] brand from every [other] beauty brand" (Fielding et al. 2008). The "real beauty" strategy afforded Dove the ability to brand its corporate identity as a problem solver, rather than a perpetuator, of the troubling messages about beauty identified by their research subjects.

In line with their findings, Dove announced its challenge to the dominant ideology: its media texts (print and television advertisements, viral videos, online presence, billboards) would feature real women (Dove's terminology) whose appearance in shape, age, color, and size contrasts with that of typical professional models. The campaign was launched in England in 2004 and was soon exported to Canada and the United States; ultimately, CFRB was marketed in thirty-five countries. The branding strategy was executed through texts, new media, and national and grassroots outreach.

The Dove Self-Esteem Fund offered a brand extension that serves as the site for in-person and online workshops providing "self-esteem toolkits" for girls and "parent kits" for mothers/mentors. In the United States, the Fund has partnered with multiple national nonprofit girls' organizations (Girl Scouts, Girls Inc., and Boys & Girls Clubs of America) to facilitate these workshops. The Dove Movement for Self-Esteem was introduced in Canada and the United States in Fall 2010.

It is crucial to understand the "feminist" players involved in the production of the campaign in order to illuminate the positioning of "real beauty" at the nexus of contemporary debates over beauty and feminist politics. We can then analyze several of CFRB's efforts to tease out their expression of themes that comprise Gill's notion of "a postfeminist sensibility."
Producing CFRB: A Feminist (Approved) Strategy?

The participation of women and girls in the production of CFRB may be read as "feminist" since it demonstrates a coming together of women from various walks of life to subvert the dominant ideology of beauty. The nature of this advocacy suggests political credibility for the "real beauty" philosophy and for CFRB’s stated aim of realizing positive social change for individuals negotiating beauty culture and for the beauty industry itself. Ostensibly, then, the feminist values of improving the lives of women and effecting change in oppressive patriarchal structures appear to underlay CFRB.

CFRB was shaped by the advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather. The team that constructed its texts included women in important positions: the agency’s Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Shelly Lazarus (a graduate of Smith College, which lists numerous feminist icons among its alumni; she sat on Smith's Board of Trustees), two creative directors, an art director, a writer, and producer. Ogilvy reached out to Susie Orbach, author of Fat Is A Feminist Issue, who, along with three other women, directed CFRB’s foundational report and much of its research.

In the US, CFRB also advanced its message via nonprofit girls' and women's organizations. Called "self-esteem" partners, the Girl Scouts, Girls Inc., and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America operated as spaces for public involvement in The Dove Self-Esteem Fund, which was financed predominantly by Unilever and supplemented by individual and corporate donations. The Fund promotes CFRB’s messages by facilitating a relationship between the corporation, girls, and their mothers/mentors in what appears to be a partnership for the common good: to change the societal perception of beauty and increase girls' self-esteem. The Fund was promoted through viral videos like "Evolution"
and "True Colors" (the latter analyzed below; for a fuller analysis of it and "Evolution," see Murray 2013). Further, through The Fund’s website and the partners’ locations and events, girls and their mothers/mentors participated in online and in-person workshops and accessed Dove-created "self-esteem" and "parent" toolkits. In addition, the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership, co-founded by Naomi Wolf and another CFRB partner, offered online programs to further women’s professional and ethical development.

So, did all these endorsements from women who have broken "the glass ceiling" and nonprofit organizations that sponsor feminist and female advocacy mean that CFRB is a feminist-approved strategy? And, in turn, can CFRB be considered a "feminist" campaign? A response to these questions is complicated by the notion that we live in a postfeminist media culture, wherein popular messages of feminism associate female empowerment with the marketplace, supporting corporate interests (Gill 2007b). The postfeminist position contends that gender equality has been achieved in the public sphere and thus separates citizenship from civic engagement (McRobbie 2008). In this light, Ogilvy CEO Lazarus has not publicly aligned herself with feminism but has been described as having a "feminist love of economic empowerment" (Dyer 2004, 191). The participation of Woodhull/Wolf with CFRB also corresponds with the "power feminist" position, which has been characterized as contending that "capital [is] the primary means of solidarity among women" (Sorisio 1997, 139).

In the wake of widespread praise, just three short years after The Beauty Myth appeared, Wolf separated herself from third wave activism in Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century. Journalist Yvonne Abraham notes Wolf’s claims about the influence of second wave ideologies on her initial
viewpoint, writing, "'The thesis of books like…The Beauty Myth are true…but that's not
the whole truth. The mindset of the second wave is far more primed to lead a young
writer like me to do the conspiratorial analysis of how women are victimized rather than
how we can end our victimization'" (Abraham 1997). In Fire with Fire, Wolf minimizes
her critique of the beauty industry and, incredulously, proposes instead that women can
be empowered by choosing how to engage in beauty practices. Her focus on agency
emphasizes the individual's internal power (which she labels "unclaimed power" [1994,
51] or "power feminism" [1994, 137]) as a source of feminist activism. She argues that
feminists who learn from their own cultural history will approach life with more
resilience and power:

I am saying, rather, that if we understand the events of the recent past and
act on that understanding…matters will become increasingly "all right."
Feminists, including myself, are often anxious when commentators focus
on women's achievements, because we fear a return to apathy. My hope is
that if we interpret the genderquake rightly, we won't stop fighting. We
will fight more intelligently and more elegantly. And we will suffer less of
the wear and tear of anger and helplessness while having a lot more fun.
(Wolf 1994, 51)

In 1997, a few years after Fire with Fire appeared, Wolf co-founded the non-
profit Woodhull Institute, whose mission remains the education of women to advance
their potential in the workplace. As part of this effort, in 2004, it partnered with Unilever
Corporation/Dove for the US media launch of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. As
one blogger noted about Wolf’s relationship with the Campaign: "If there is a cheque
involved, can Wolf be credible? To go from writing The Beauty Myth to touring with
Dove and singing its praises is a big jump" (Johnson 2008). At the same time, the author
optimistically queries whether Wolf is actually "spreading her message about the
hypocrisy of the beauty industry, all on Dove’s dime? Savvy audience members would
certainly catch the irony, and Dove can laugh all the way to the bank. Everybody wins" (Johnson 2008).

Wolf's trajectory from critic to collaborator builds on the legacy of earlier self-identified feminists who worked alongside and inside the beauty industry (discussed in Chapter 2). By virtually disowning her critique of that industry, Wolf raises critical questions about the meaning of feminist activism around and the relation of female power to beauty. Certainly, her association with CFRB's "self-esteem" partnership aids the corporation's identification with feminist grassroots effort, and obscures a corporate tactic to minimize the connection between Dove and Unilever's other brands, and perhaps to even distract attention away from Unilever's ownership structure. For instance, Unilever also owns Slimfast (a diet plan), Fair & Lovely Fairness Cream (a skin lightening product), and Axe deodorant (whose ads objectify women). Although CFRB may echo feminist concerns by addressing the industry's problematic representations of beauty, we must be careful in identifying CFRB as a call to feminist arms.

**CFRB's "Real Beauty:" Self-Esteem and Body Acceptance**

CFRB was carried out across numerous media genres (see Murray 2013 for further analysis), several of which are examined here: CFRB's manifesto built on an introductory image; an advertisement for Dove Firming Lotion, one of its product launches; and the Dove Self Esteem Fund's viral video "True Colors." The messages draw on key themes in feminist politics -- liberation and oppression -- to present "real beauty" as a democratizing force that frees women from the directives of the dominant ideology of beauty.
Print Launch: CFRB's Manifesto (Fig. 16)

The print launch is comprised of six images, in which five women are all photographed against a white background; five are portraits (close-ups of faces and two body shots at a distance) and one is a composite picture of all five. The use of feminist language and the representation of "real" women in the manifesto are employed to state the aim of the Campaign and draw audiences to identify with its message. Arranged in a line, the "real" women exhibit physical attributes intended to signal a departure from the dominant ideology of beauty. They represent CFRB's target consumers and they serve as a source of identification for them by inviting these women to embrace "real beauty."

Underneath the portraits, the copy states:

For too long, beauty has been defined by narrow, unattainable stereotypes. It's time to change all that. Because Dove believes real beauty comes in many shapes, sizes, colors and ages. It's why we started the campaign for real beauty. And why we hope you'll take part. Together, let's think, talk, debate and learn how to make beauty real again. Cast your vote at campaignforrealbeauty.com.

The five women also appear separately in portraits where their image is positioned next to questions that address the dominant ideology of beauty; each query offers two options. The three close-up photos are accompanied by ballot boxes next to descriptive labels in the form of questions: "wrinkled? wonderful?" (Fig. 17), "gray? gorgeous?" (Fig. 18) and "flawed? flawless?" (Fig. 19). Each image is also accompanied by a broader question: "Will society ever accept old can be beautiful?" (Fig. 17); "Why aren't women glad to be gray?" (Fig. 18); and "Does beauty mean looking like everyone else?" (Fig. 19). These images appeared as interactive billboards and on the CFRB website, encouraging people to respond to the queries.
The remaining two women are photographed from head to thighs. They are presented in ways that more directly deal with body acceptance. One image ("half empty? half full?"; Fig. 20) depicts a slim, smiling, short-haired, small-breasted black woman in a white tank top and jeans with her hands in her back pockets; the text beside her breast questions, "Does sexiness depend on how full your cups are?" This phrasing poses an intertextual reference to the rhetorical expression, "Is the glass half empty or half full?" The other image ("oversized? outstanding?"; Fig. 21) depicts a full-figured, smiling, large-breasted Caucasian woman in a strapless black cocktail dress with hands crossed behind her head; the text, positioned at her hips, asks, "Does true beauty only squeeze into a size 6?" Both of the confidently smiling visages connote an optimistic, "real beauty" answer to the ballot box question posed next to them. The full-figured woman has a confident posture, with arrows created by her arms and elbows that direct the audience to the bare skin above her breasts and on her arms. The thin woman draws attention to her lean body by positioning her hands at her back, which highlights her small circumference; her mid-section, clothed in a white tank top, blends in with the background, again highlighting her slim physique. Likewise, the freckled woman (Fig. 19) reveals her thin upper body through a barely-there tank top, its placement offering another meaning of "flawed?/flawless" as referencing her breast size.

The representations of these women problematize the issues of breast size and body weight that often signify female sexuality in American culture. Women, regardless of race or class, have attempted to resolve self-esteem problems arising from a perceived deficit in these areas through diets and/or plastic surgery that are potentially harmful. Yet the casting of these women based on their physical attributes inherently objectifies them
since their bodies are employed by Dove to promote ideological and economic consumption by consumers.

Moreover, the central meaning of "real beauty" in the aforementioned texts is connected to a voting device which is meant to resonate with earlier struggles over women's suffrage. While it was a long fight over seventy years for women to achieve the right to vote, women can vote immediately as part of CFRB. But this is not an election and the "casting of one's vote" in such context could be interpreted as devaluing suffrage itself. Instead, by tallying the votes on publicly displayed interactive billboards and on the CFRB website, the women in the ad become objects for approval or disapproval by the "real" judgment of global audiences, with potentially disempowering consequences for the "real" models. Moreover, CFRB's constriction of the descriptive labels--wherein the voter is able to select only one option--does not allow for debate and limits the audience's freedom of expression. Such devices facilitate Dove's authority to frame "real women" and regulate the audiences who both identify with and judge them.

Product Launch: Dove Firming Lotion (Fig. 22)

Like the manifesto, CFRB's advertisement for its skin Firming Lotion depicts "real women" whose appearance contrasts with the dominant ideology of homogeneous female beauty. However, the images and copy still suggest that conformity is a feature of "real beauty." Visually, the women's positioning atop the copy takes a figurative stand against supermodel-style beauty. Supporting standard beauty messaging, though, the lack of clothing and the bodies' positioning suggest objectification of the women for the purpose of selling goods and the "real beauty" philosophy. They wear bras and underwear, undergarments signifying intimacy (perhaps of a sexual nature); this connotation is
reinforced by their physical arrangement: the hip of one woman touches the lower abdomen of the woman next to her, who leans to touch the woman behind her. The women thus present their bodies for the potential pleasure of audiences (sexual and/or emotional), much as professional models do.

Yet the copy indicates that Dove liberates women by helping them to be "real," separating them from audiences who are oppressed by the dominant ideology. It reads:

Let's face it, firming the thighs of a size 2 supermodel is no challenge. Real women have real curves. And according to women who tried new Dove Firming, it left their skin feeling firmer in just one week. What better way to celebrate the curves you were born with? New Dove Firming Lotion, Cream and Body Wash. For beautifully firm skin.

Since "real women" have "beautifully firm skin," they are able to "celebrate" their "curves" because this product helps them to manage "the curves you [they] were born with." Thus, "real beauty" is attainable through the consumption of Dove products, reinforcing audience members' identity as consumers. The "real women" support this interpretation by providing a product testimonial: "according to women who tried new Dove, it left their skin feeling firmer in just one week." Importantly, the "real women," like the audience, need a product to change the bodies with which they were born, and their testimonials reflect the beginning of their journey to conformity -- as "firm," "real women." Their material consumption also highlights their ideological acceptance of Dove's inference that their bodies are flawed objects to be fixed since skin should apparently always be firm (which echoes the dominant ideology of beauty). The "real women," though, present empowered attitudes about showing their bodies, particularly in sexually suggestive poses, reinforcing postfeminist claims that sexual objectification can be pleasurable.
Dove Self-Esteem Fund's Viral Video: "True Colors"

Dove focused CFRB’s messaging to self-esteem in 2006 videos promoting the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, which was established by and is primarily financed by Unilever. The videos make an obvious link between body acceptance and self-esteem as a crucial component of the "real beauty" ideology. They are designed to arouse hostility against the dominant ideology of beauty and garner support for "real beauty" by agreeing with the Fund's claim that girls' psychological and physical health depends on building "self-esteem."

In "True Colors," Dove represents itself as a facilitator and problem-solver, declaring: "let's change their minds/we've created the Dove self-esteem fund/because every girl deserves to feel good about herself/and see how beautiful...she really is/ help us...get involved at" the CFRB website. "True Colors" offers a range of emotions through the expressions of "real" girls of various sizes and ethnicities. At first, the girls' faces reflect innocence or ambivalence, bolstered by linguistic signs connoting feelings of victimization--"hates her freckles," "thinks she's ugly," "wishes she were blonde," "afraid she's fat"--because they do not meet the dominant ideology of beauty. The lyrics simultaneously elevate the poignant portraits and offer an intimate relationship with the person ("I") in the music and the girls in the text: "Show me a smile then, don't be unhappy, can't remember when, I last saw you laughing, If this world makes you crazy and you've taken all you can bear, You call me up, because you know I'll be there."

Halfway through the video, an emotional shift occurs following the encouraging phrase, "Let's change their minds," splashed against a white background. The lyrics also become positive: "And I'll see your true colors shining through." Accompanying this
phrase is a group of smiling girls euphorically pumping their hands in the air, an intertextual reference to the iconic image of "Rosie the Riveter," whose slogan was "We Can Do It!" Another phrase, "We've created the Dove Self-Esteem Fund," appears next, also against a white background. Smiling girls appear throughout the rest of the text, accompanying the announcement of leadership via the Fund and the lyrics: "I see your true colors, And that's why I love you, So don't be afraid, To let them show, You're beautiful like a rainbow." The white background on which the pivotal message appears signifies light, symbolizing Dove as the caring narrator ("I") and the ray of light illuminating the public perception of female beauty and girls' "real beauty." "True Colors" moves CFRB's messaging to direct participation in becoming a "real beauty." The intersection of being a "real beauty" and postfeminist self-branding was then realized through a series of other CFRB tactics.

**Participating in a Brand Community to Be a "Real Beauty"**

The ideas of popular feminism and social change conveyed by CFRB suggests that audiences should self-brand as postfeminist "real beauties." The Dove Movement for Self-Esteem is primarily an online branding strategy deployed through social media and the corporate website. The Movement continues CFRB's global conversation about beauty with the aim of "building a world where women everywhere have the tools to inspire each other and the girls in their lives" ("Dove Movement for Self-Esteem" n.d.). The Movement and CFRB share the same ideology but use slightly different terms to suggest their distinctiveness and, perhaps, reinvention. For instance, CFRB does not appear on the Movement's site, but a link is offered to Dove's homepage on which CFRB is listed (though not prominently). Moreover, the word "Movement" denotes a group that
engages women's participation collectively (like the feminist movement), emphasizing users' participation as a prerequisite for liberation.

The centerpiece of the Movement is acceptance of its mission, which is executed when women and girls acknowledge their participation by signing a "declaration" to "Join the Movement." A declaration denotatively grants power to the audience by offering the opportunity to make a choice and assert oneself. Yet the Movement's language communicates a hegemonic relationship between the corporation and its followers, asking users to join "our Movement," "our vision," and "our cause." The declaration itself amounts to providing an email address, first and last name, zip code, and age, as well as an answer to an "optional" question: "What advice would you give to your 13 year old self? We'll collect these messages and deliver them to girls to build self-esteem in the next generation" ("Our Vision: Join Us" 2011).

Minimizing the only question that may stimulate self-awareness and self-care suggests that the purpose of the declaration is for Unilever/Dove to gather demographic information. After all, corporations can "expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and reinforce viewer commitments" (Jenkins 2008, 18) by using new media "designed to be more responsive to consumer feedback" (Jenkins 2008, 133). That the Movement may be using the declaration to create a list of consumers under the guise of inspiring social change is not surprising: CFRB was formulated on the findings from a global research study and Dove has conducted numerous global and national surveys throughout the Campaign. The Movement can thus be seen as a form of market research, and the Movement's participants as its research subjects. The work of media studies theorist Mark Andrejevic is of particular importance here, as he contends that it is critical to question
the politics of participation by users, who may be involved in "the labor of detailed information gathering and comprehensive monitoring…in the name of their own empowerment…and to view such participation as a form of power sharing" (2007, 15).

The Movement's declaration serves as a contractual agreement between audiences and the "real beauty" ideology, whose potential for the liberation of women and girls is questionable.

By signing the declaration, girls and women work to become neoliberal subjects who accept responsibility for developing and performing Dove-approved "self-esteem" practices (requiring self-judgment and self-monitoring of one's emotional state) that are integral to the pursuit of "real beauty." Joining the Movement aligns its participants with neoliberal governmentality and, thus, postfeminist citizenship. "Real beauty," like "fierce," appears to empower women by enhancing their sense of self even as it advocates non-hegemonic bodies; ANTM embraces the first of these efforts, but not the second. However, both texts focus on the self as primarily based on appearance. Yet audiences' compliance with the "real beauty" ideology allows Dove to distance itself from its cultural role as a producer of the dominant ideology by placing the responsibility for women's and girls' lack of self-esteem on themselves.

This fusion of participation in and consumption of "real beauty" suggests that female audiences will voluntarily shape their identity, including their bodies, through the practice of self-branding. By branding themselves as a "real beauty," girls and women derive their identity from internalizing the meanings and representations produced by Dove and thereby aligning themselves with the postfeminist citizen who obeys CFRB's rules in the name of empowerment. Becoming "a real beauty" necessitates ideological
and material labor on the self that originates from acceptance of the "real beauty" myth: support of CFRB's views of female beauty help girls and women achieve Dove's version of self-esteem, which involves embracing women's traditional role as consumers.

While CFRB denotatively associates "real beauty" with diversity and independence, its connotative signs stand in stark contrast to those values. In fact, self-branding as "a real beauty" enlists conformity: labor to become part of an "inventor[y] of branded selves" (Hearn 2008b, 211) from which Dove profits "by packaging, branding them, and selling them back to themselves" (Hearn 2008b, 209). Moreover, regardless of their awareness as self-branders, women and girls--by virtue of this process--become "global value subjects. They are product, producer, and consumer, but they do not control the means of their own distribution" (Hearn 2008b, 213). By signing the Movement's declaration, women declare themselves postfeminist citizens whose labor and "real" identity serve the aims of institutional power. Dove's brand messaging invites an analysis of women's engagement in the practice of self-branding as a "real beauty." She underscores the internalization of and interaction with CFRB's meanings and representations, signaling the highest degree of attachment to the brand. CFRB's promotion of self-esteem advocates self-governance as necessary to the realization of "real beauty."

**Final Thoughts**

These case studies of Moss, *ANTM*, and CFRB have laid a foundation for understanding the ways in which the practice of postfeminist self-branding has become normalized in late twentieth century and early twenty-first century Western consumer culture. While the labels promoted by each -- "rexy," "fierce," and "real beauty" --
communicate different values, they all signify a brand that has been developed around messages of beauty in postfeminist media culture. Thus, they associate beauty with corporate culture while suggesting that the meanings they promote lead to empowerment.

At the same time, these postfeminist self-brands work to facilitate an emotional connection between corporate entities and audiences: namely, that the brands personify care for the consumer. Learning how to be "fierce" ostensibly trains women for success in the competitive modeling world. Learning to accept "real beauty" in place of hegemonic beauty or learning ways to be "rexy" within the context of hegemonic beauty offer women different routes to negotiate their struggle with beauty norms. While caring for audiences is not an aspect of Moss' brand, the continued power of "rexy" suggests that women view it as a path to success and, in this sense, as self-care.

These meanings around care for the self within postfeminist consumer culture are directly tied to each brand's bottom line. For instance, advising women to be a "real beauty" has created a niche market for Dove that is commodifiable and attached to brand messaging. Thus, although CFRB seems to echo of feminist concerns by addressing the beauty industry's problematic representations, it is hardly a call to feminist arms. The Campaign does not seek to create awareness about female beauty as a social issue that has institutional underpinnings (for example, concretely addressing the links between eating disorders, body image issues, and beauty industry discourse/images). Instead, "real beauty" offers another corporate ideology that reinforces the longstanding ideas about female beauty and garners women's agreement with its values of ideological and material consumption. At its core lies a paradox: while apparently decrying it, "real beauty" embraces conformity to hegemonic beauty standards through both corporate instigation
for brand attachment and women's striving to be part of what they may feel is a positive beauty ideology.

Banks' success with her "fierce" brand, meanwhile, signifies that when an ambitious woman situates her life around meanings associated with beauty, her financial and cultural power can increase exponentially. As a model, Banks made substantial sums of money from her representation of beauty, and in her extended career as a producer, she has built a brand that commodifies other women's beauty. She teaches women that part of being "fierce" is being a tireless laborer who strives to perfect her appearance and attitude in order to sell goods to an audience. As such, "fierce" promotes conformity to and participation in hegemonic femininity and neoliberal attitudes under the guise of being empowered. As a cultural producer of popular culture texts, Banks requires her contestants to self-brand as "fierce." The process in which they partake encourages them to desire their own subjugation and show appreciation for her corporate identity.

As with Banks, Moss' value of "rexy," which symbolizes hegemonic beauty, equally signifies living one's life by focusing on beauty as an asset. However, because Moss makes no claims about care for her audiences, her self-promotion highlights celebrity and wealth as the ultimate reward of success. Thus, even though it may take unhealthy means (drugs, eating disorders) to get there and Moss' aesthetic may provoke conflict in female audiences, many women still consider achieving that appearance as worth the price. Moreover, the flaws that accompany Moss' "rexy" public image also make her aspirational and contribute to her success as a celebrity: that is, her "ability to look beautiful despite her alleged partying proclivities has become a very lucrative part of her brand" (Vernon 2006). After her cocaine scandal and a short stint in rehab, Moss
expanded her own brand. In addition to continuing to model, she designed an eponymous clothing collection for retailer Topshop as well as a handbag line for high-end fashion brand Longchamp. She may also expand her brand by developing a modeling school (Bergin 2010). In fact, Moss emerged from her scandal even more financially viable, with her estimated 2007 earnings of $9 million (Blakeley 2007) almost doubling her previous year's income. And her earnings have continued to climb, increasing to $13.5 million between June 2010 and June 2011 (Milligan 2011).

These case studies, taken together, elucidate the kinds of mixed messages about beauty and empowerment that the subjects of the next chapter have grown up with. They highlight a key point for this research: that beauty is a critical issue in contemporary culture for women and that by engaging in immaterial/affective labor to self-brand around their chosen value of beauty, women can be outwardly empowered and attain cultural and financial power in their lives. Moss, ANTM, and CFRB all present versions of beauty that signal women's ultimate contentment with their bodies/beauty. By working on their bodies (ANTM), even though it may involve unhealthy measures (Moss) and obvious consumerism and self-sexualization (CFRB), these postfeminist self-brands suggest that women can be pro-active in constructing themselves as beautiful and forego ongoing emotional struggle with their bodies. Across these cultural forms, there is an imperative for body acceptance, whatever the size (being criticized for being too skinny as per Moss, or too large as per CFRB), from which social acceptability and personal/professional success can grow. As will be discussed in the following studies of online communities, women have taken consumer culture strategies of postfeminist self-
branding and incorporated them into their own self-brands that circulate around ostensibly their own empowering practices and values around beauty.
CHAPTER 4: THREE BEAUTY-CENTERED ONLINE COMMUNITIES: FAT ACCEPTANCE, WANNAREXIC, AND WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY

This chapter offers an examination of three online groups that absorb and recirculate the postfeminist values around beauty and embodiment: fat acceptance (FA), wannarexics, and weight loss surgery patients. Women in the FA group may refer to themselves and others in the group as "fatties," just as women in the bariatric surgery group may refer to themselves or others as "WLS-ers." Women who want to "be anorexic" are labeled as "wannarexic" by pro-anas and this label is also used in popular culture to refer to this group, although they do not refer to themselves as such (see Chapter 1 for additional discussion). Accordingly, I refer to the members of these groups as fatties, WLS-ers, and wannarexics, respectively. Prior to presenting the analysis, I contextualize each group's relationship with feminism and/or the interpretations of the group by feminists, as well as a full description of each of the sites of analysis.

Sites of Inquiry

The American Fat Acceptance (FA) movement, which began in the 1960s, was home to a variety of groups working to effect social change regarding issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality. It aimed to raise consciousness in the public about various forms of oppression (e.g., inequality, stigmatization, and discrimination) related to body size (Sobal 1999, 234). FA and second wave feminism overlapped, particularly with self-identified fat feminists (a radical group, many of whom were lesbian). FA developed organizations for political activism and provided a community for social support, both of which worked to reframe, reclaim, and transform "fat from a sign of sickness and failure to a sign of power, beauty, and resistance" (Resenbrink 2010, 214).
The FA movement understood that "hatred of fat was an effect of patriarchy" (Resenbrink 2010, 216) and asserted that "fat hatred is the last acceptable bigotry" (Weitze 2006, 1). Collectively, advocates of FA rejected ideologies of the beauty industry. In 1969, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) "was created explicitly to contest popular notions of beauty" (Gilman 2008, 111). In 1973, the "Fat Liberation Manifesto" called for collective activism against institutional power: "We refuse to be subjugated to the interests of our enemies. We fully intend to reclaim power over our bodies and our lives" (Baxandall and Gordon 2001, 191). NAAFA has continued to seek improvement of the quality of life for fat people through advocacy via rallies, protests, letter writing campaigns (e.g., against the airline industry, health care reform proposals, and advertisements); through public education in mainstream media (e.g., interviews on television programs such as The Oprah Winfrey Show, and in print media such as The New York Times); and through organizational interaction (via the NAAFA website, meetings at regional chapters and an annual convention).

Fat feminists rejected media representations of oversize women’s bodies, which they found to be "derogatory" (Resenbrink 2010, 218). As an example, they challenged the popularity of waifish model Twiggy. Taking a page from "be-ins" staged by Vietnam War protestors, they organized a "'Fat-In' and ate ice cream while burning posters" (Fletcher 2009) of Twiggy. Fat activists also protested media coverage of the death of singer Cass Elliot, of the Mamas and the Papas. Offsetting reports that she died by choking on a sandwich, they argued that she did not die from "greed or sloth...the fact that she was fat didn't kill her, but likely the constant dieting she was subjected to had brought on the heart attack that did" (Resenbrink 2010, 213).
The FA movement was in full swing by the mid-1970s, with women's centers dotting cities across the United States. While it was becoming clear to many fat women that the experience of their body size was "critical to their own identities and politics" (Farrell 1998, 145), it was often not so clear to thin feminists that there was a relationship between fat and gender oppression (Farrell 1998, 147). This created a conflict in the feminist movement, reflected in the rejection of fat activists' literature by most feminist presses (and mainstream presses as well). Fat feminists responded by becoming cultural producers who fashioned their own media venues; for instance, Vivian Mayer started Fat Liberator Publications. Some feminist theorists also used the negative attitudes toward "overweight" women to emphasize the role of social demands to be thin in creating a fat-loathing culture (Chernin 1981), and to critique social codes that privilege thinness and scorn fatness (Bordo 1993).

In the 1980s and into the 1990s, the FA momentum increased and the political complexion of the movement began to change. Notably, it gained new support as it merged with the "nondieting movement." Thus Marilyn Wann's book, *Fat!So?: Because You Don't Have to Apologize For Your Size!* was promoted via mass media outlets. Wann strategically situated herself in the tradition of activism, coining the term "flabulous," which means "not apologizing for your size" (1998, 184) and writing "The Fat!So? Manifesto." Her title was similar to that of a manifesto put out by an earlier group, Fat Underground, which was more radical than NAAFA and in 1973 promoted its "Fat Liberation Manifesto." The Fat Underground text called for fat people to receive equal rights and equal opportunities and used the collective language of “We.” Wann’s manifesto, on the other hand, advocated for social change regarding the fat body, offering
an individual response that recognized fat as a part of one's identity. Separating her "revolution" from any structural critique, Wann claimed fat is an attitude to be embraced by individuals in order to experience agency:

1. Fat!So? calls for a revolution. The revolution starts with a simple question: You're fat! So what?
2. There's nothing wrong with being fat. Just like there's nothing wrong with being short or tall, black or brown. These are facts of identity that cannot and should not be changed. They are birthright. They are heritage. They're beyond cures or aesthetics. They provide the diversity we need to survive.
3. Fat people are not, by definition, lazy or stupid...
5. Fat!So? invites you to become a flabulous fatso - everybody, size 6 to 16, size 2X to 12X - because fat or thin, straight or gay, male or female, we have all at some point wasted our precious moments on the planet worrying about how we look. Stop that! Just say the magic words: "Yes, I am a fatso!"...[and] You turn fat hatred back on itself... (1998, 28)

Wann's advocacy of empowerment meshes neatly within postfeminist media culture, which was emerging around the time her book was published (1998). Yet recent work on the obese body not only celebrates flabulousness but also addresses the ways in which such bodies speak to narratives of overconsumption and neoliberalism (Murray 2005; Shugart 2010). This project will consider meanings of the obese body as produced in the neoliberal context, specifically postfeminist media culture. It will also focus on individuals in the FA movement online, where much of the their communications have occurred since the early 2000s.

In the "fatosphere" (Harding 2009), fat people facilitate a space in which they support a fat body as a positive lifestyle. Research on the fatosphere indicates that the users experience empowerment through strong community support (Dickens et al. 2011). The fat acceptance movement supports a fat body as a positive lifestyle. In the “fatosphere” (Rabin 2008), female users reclaim the word “fat” (Tennant n.d.) and
express rejection of the diet industry's claim “that all a fat person needs to do to be thin is exercise more and eat less” (Rabin 2008). Instead, self-proclaimed “fatties” argue that people “can eat whatever they want and, in the process, improve their physical and mental health and stabilize their weight” (Katz 2009). One fat acceptance blogger stated, “Blogging is a way for people to fight back” (Rabin 2008). This online space is used for two purposes: activism against “discriminatory food advertisements or [to] boycott insensitive organizations” (Samuel 2007) and support in a cultural climate shaped by media stereotypes of fat people “as ugly, lazy…repulsive” (Tennant n.d.) that they feel generates size discrimination and fat-phobia. As a means of reconfiguring messages about obesity, bloggers use these stereotypes “as the basis for discourse and deconstruction” (Tennant n.d.).

FA supporters have actively fought against western attitudes toward fat, articulated by cultural theorist Samantha Murray as "a negative collective 'knowingness' about fatness...[that associates fat with] laziness, gluttony, poor personal hygiene, and lack of fortitude” (2005, 154). They have rejected dieting and the diet industry in favor of intuitive eating, pleasurable physical activity, and a consistent (although high) weight and promoted "a new way of seeing fat...[where] they have rights to pleasure, to friends, to romantic partners, to good health care, to fair treatment in jobs” (Farrell 1998, 139).

On Project Lifesize (PL), vlogging is prevalent for FA participants in the age group of my subjects (late teens to early 30s), and it is a popular site in the YouTube FA community. Over PL's almost four years of activity, it posted 1,301 videos, grew to 12,246 subscribers, and had 1,674,288 views (as of November 14, 2012). Furthermore,
PL inspired several sister channels\(^6\), suggesting that its messages resonated with individuals to such a degree that they created their own media texts in response.

In September 2008, PL went live, at the initiative of 22-year-old Meghan Tonjes. She conceptualized it as a collaborative channel, which is a YouTube channel that is generally shared by several people around topics designated by a leader. Meghan selected women, based on their audition videos, to vlog weekly about a topic of her choice. One person is assigned to make a video each weekday. Meghan is vague regarding the underpinnings of her selection process; she notes that she "chose them [vloggers] for a reason...watch the videos and figure out why I chose them." The nature of PL as a collaborative channel underscores a tension between this term and aggregation of individuals that produce community values of beauty.

While Meghan is the only constant vlogger since PL's inception, her fellow vloggers were foundational in positioning the channel's messages and also provided the majority of the videos that comprised the venture. The individuals are referred to by their first names, which is how they self-identify online (see Figs. 23-28 for screen grabs of the vloggers). They include: Meghan (22) from Michigan, Crystal (25) from San Francisco, Gili (20) from Boston, Shan (21) from Pennsylvania, Alexis (18) from Colorado, and Gretchen (36) from Arizona. All the vloggers are women, and they are similar in terms of age (most are in the 20s), sexuality (all proclaim their heterosexuality), and geography (all are resident in the United States). The vloggers are overweight/obese, even those who have lost weight (Alexis and Gili both lost 30+ pounds) still shop in plus

\(^6\) The other sister channels include Big Is Beauty Project, which has 236,849 video views and 863 subscribers; Real Tubes: Real Big Girl's [sic] Being Real, which has 128,838 video views and 349 subscribers; and Life Is For Embracing (L.I.F.E) which has 73,047 video views and 236 subscribers.
size clothing stores as sizes 16+. There is variety⁷, though, in race: 1/3 of the vloggers are of color (Alexis is African American, and Crystal is Latina), and 2/3 are Caucasian.

Being a Viewer of the Week (VOTW) provided the opportunity for a PL user to become a temporary channel vlogger. Two VOTWs (Gretchen and Shan) were upgraded to weekly vloggers when spots were available. That availability was the result of vloggers departing because of school and/or work commitments. Being a fill-in vlogger by being a friend of Gili’s also afforded Alexis a promotion to weekly status. In addition to posting vlogs, PL women would also respond to subscribers' feedback on their texts.

While FA supporters predominately use vlogs to express their attitudes and concerns regarding their bodies and the beauty industry, wannarexics favor blogging, perhaps recognizing the tension between their values and their appearance. Anorexia is an eating disorder characterized by self-starvation for the purpose of weight loss. Anorexia is defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) as having "a body weight at a level less than 85% of normal weight for age and height, an intense fear of fatness, disturbed experience of one’s body weight or shape, and amenorrhea for at least three consecutive menstrual cycles" (Polivy and Herman para in Shade 2003). Psychologists Margo Maine and Joe Kelly note that medical authorities view anorexia as the mental illness with "the highest mortality rate" (2005, 81). Individuals with anorexia die from heart attacks, suicide, or electrolyte imbalance (Maine and Kelly 2005). Alternately, recovery can take upwards of five years; Maine and Kelly stress, "There is no quick-fix for anorexia"

⁷ As Meghan did not provide criteria about her selection process, it is difficult to discern whether the women who applied to be PL vloggers were of similar races/ethnicities, ages, sexuality, and classes, or if she intentionally or subconsciously selected women of uniform demographics.
Anorexic behaviors include individuals' strict limiting of calories (oftentimes below 400 calories per day), weighing themselves and food obsessively, consuming only certain foods/beverages deemed "safe" (generally those with limited calories, such as iceberg lettuce or diet coke), and exercising constantly. Additional measures for weight loss include "us[ing] stimulants, enemas, and diuretics" (Maine and Kelly 2005, 80). For many decades, anorexics have been characterized as "Young, White, heterosexual, middle-class college women" (Lorber and Moore 2006, 105).

Since the late 1970s, feminists have examined eating disorders as a female response to hegemonic femininity. Susie Orbach stated in Fat Is A Feminist Issue that anorexia underscores women's lack of personal and cultural power in a patriarchal society and that they then try to reassert a sense of control through their refusal of food. Yet, the expression of this power is complicated by the anorexic's frail appearance (Orbach 1978, 178). While the production of the anorexic body is sometimes viewed as an act of desexualization, limiting one's attractiveness to men (Orbach 1978, 173), the emaciated body is also an intriguing symbol for individuals who "diet chronically...[as anorexics] are living out the logical extension of our shared obsession" (Chernin 1981, 45). Recognizing the increasing cultural infatuation with the anorexic body in the early 1980s, Kim Chernin declared, "The anorexic girl has become our present cultural heroine" (1981, 47). Susan Brownmiller noted the problematics of revering the emaciated body since it represents an "obsessive pursuit of thinness [that] has crossed the line into self-destruction" (1984, 49-50). In the 1990s, feminists extended this analysis by examining eating disorders as disciplinary practices that shape women's subjectivity. Susan Bordo stated that eating disorders "train the female body in docility and obedience
to cultural demands" (1993, 27), and that these bodies "are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, [and] 'improvement'" (1993, 166).

More recently, gender scholars have studied the communication of "pro-anas," who assemble online and endorse anorexia as a positive lifestyle. In their 2011 piece, "Anorexia as a Choice: Constructing a New Community of Health and Beauty through Pro-Ana Websites," sociologists Abigail Richardson and Elizabeth Cherry interpret pro-ana websites as "a postmodern form of agency" (2011, 120) that relates to individuals' constructions of their bodies as processes unto themselves. In this framework, these websites can be viewed as venues for political action and pro-ana bodies as texts for the inscription of action that "promote[s] larger social agendas (political)...[as pro-anas participate in] communities that support resistance to...larger social systems and structures that reinforce domination and perpetuate hegemony" (Banuelos and Battaglia 2007, 1–2). Following on the 2003 study by communication studies scholar Leslie Regan Shade, Banuelos and Battaglia reject the notion that pro-anas are victims or mentally unstable, instead focusing on "the positive benefits of creating their own community" (2007, 2).

Psychologist Deborah Pollack makes a significant counterargument to this agentive perspective. She worries that this line of thought "romanticiz[es]" (2003, 249) these sites, as it "condone[s] the inherent self-destructiveness [of pro-anas and]...create[s] new possibilities for the pro-anorexic subject to become a symbolic martyr" (Pollack 2003, 249). Bordo echoes this perspective, pointing out that such postmodern views promote the acceptability of eating disorders while reinforcing the patriarchal silencing of women by "isolat[ing], weaken[ing], and undermin[ing]" (1993, 176–177) anorexics.
Thirty years after Chernin identified the anorexic as a "cultural heroine," Joan Brumberg acknowledged that "American women have a love-hate relationship with this disease...normal women tell me jokingly that they 'wished they could have anorexia'...[to meet] the current ideal of nearly emaciated female beauty--- [which] make[s] it tempting to call this 'The Anorexic Age'" (1997, xvii). In this cultural climate, rife with eating disorders and disordered eating (Hesse-Biber 2006), wannarexia -- a label for those who do not meet the diagnostic criteria for anorexia, but are inspired by the anorexic's self-governance and by the product of her labor, the emaciated body, to partake in the same diet/exercise behaviors and mindset -- has emerged as "a cultural phenomenon" (Bauman 2007).

In 2007, sociologists Natalie Boero and C.J. Pascoe identified wannarexics as originating in the online pro-ana movement. They describe a group who were called "wannarexic" by those in the community who had been diagnosed with anorexia. This label was used as a charge against users who, they felt, communicated "fail[ure] at their weight-loss goals or [were] seek[ing] to go on a diet rather than make a commitment to anorexia as a lifestyle....and [their statements were in contrast to anorexics who viewed themselves as] more committed, more in control, and more dedicated to thinness than dieters who may go on and off diets" (Boero and Pascoe 2007, 39). Wannarexics were thus refused a pro-ana identity by the anorexics, but nonetheless "openly refer to each other as 'ana'" (Cohen 2007) online. Journalists in mainstream publications (e.g., Newsday, The Huffington Post) popularized this group with titles like "Eating Disorder Wannabees" (Cohen 2007), and characterized them as viewing anorexia as "a 'quick fix'
to lose weight [as they believe] that it is glamorous” (Cohen 2007). Wannarexics' weight is generally "between healthy and overweight" (Bauman 2007).

Wannarexics are different than extreme weight-loss practitioners or extreme dieters in that they see themselves as engaged in a lifestyle, claiming the commitment, control and dedication to thinness that is at the core of a pro-ana identity, even if anorexics do not view them in this way. For anorexics, the term "ana" is used to personify the eating disordered identity (Pipher 1994). Ana is interpreted by these women as a female friend (even a goddess) who supports anorexic behaviors and thoughts; not surprisingly, "Expression of commitment to ana was a key characteristic of establishing a pro-ana identity" (Haas et al. 2011, 47). In addition, although not a medical diagnosis, Dr. Harry Brandt, director of the Center for Eating Disorders, has noted "Some girls labeled as wannarexic may fit a diagnosis of EDNOS" (Bauman 2007). EDNOS, an acronym for Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified, is "a deadly condition, with a mortality rate of 5.2 percent – higher than both anorexia and bulimia" (Battiste and Effron 2012). As mentioned, EDNOS is currently the most common eating disordered diagnostic group (Thomas et al. 2009), and individuals with this diagnosis may possess many of the clinical symptoms of anorexia and bulimia, engaging in self-starvation and/or purging, but do not “meet all the criteria” (Button et al. 2005, 134) of these conditions. The health repercussions of EDNOS are similar to anorexia and bulimia, such as dehydration, kidney problems, heart attacks, and death. However, “EDNOS can be extremely difficult to detect because the victims are often close to their normal weight…Many people, including health care professionals, are uneducated about EDNOS…the failure of medical personnel to take EDNOS seriously leads to feelings of despair on the part of the
patient and an escalation of the disorder” (Livingston 2007). EDNOS, by definition, then, describes a gray area in which people may struggle -- significantly or moderately -- with meanings of food, diet, and beauty, but overall they seek to achieve the female body that is deemed socially acceptable by consumer culture.

While wannarexia has been little studied, it has attracted the attention of the medical establishment. Even for those wannarexics who are not diagnosed with EDNOS, because they may be without "the psychological constitution to be diagnosed with an eating disorder" (Henry 2007), they are nonetheless at "the start of a slippery slope...it can lead to developing a full-fledged eating disorder or it can at the very least cause compulsive behaviors or obsessive behaviors, which can be unhealthy" ("What Is Wannarexia?” n.d.). In addition, wannarexics can also suffer from stomach, digestive, and heart issues, which can be physically and/or emotionally damaging. In the journal, Nursing Inquiry, Pamela K. Hardin proposed that such individuals have what she calls "anorexic yearning" (Hardin 2003). In sum, wannarexics are different from anorexics in that they are not clinically diagnosed, but they participate on pro-ana sites to get tips and tricks from anorexics to lose weight and they may have disordered eating and even EDNOS. This study of wannarexics illustrates how women who struggle with their weight use technology to participate in a community with extreme views and approaches to weight loss in an effort to achieve their weight loss goals via an anorexic lifestyle.

Importantly, wannarexics aspire to present themselves as ideologically similar to anorexics, even though they lack the rigor in terms of body labor that is integral to the anorexic value system.
The Livejournal Community ana_circle (AC) is an online pro-ana site where many wannarexics congregate. Wannarexic activity may occur on AC because the site does not deter them; it does not, for instance, have a warning on its homepage as other pro-ana sites do regarding wannarexics. The site pro-ana-nation, for instance, proclaims, "this [site] is for people with real eating disorders. In other words, no wannarexics."

Over AC's almost ten years of activity, it has logged 2,941 members, 2,559 watchers, 11,060 journal entries, and 40,543 comments received (as of February 23, 2013). Blogging is the mode of communication on this site.

AC was created on June 28, 2003 in the wake of popular media attention to pro-ana sites (Day and Keyes 2009). The site does not provide information about its creator, and its administrator has changed over time, suggesting that the power dynamics among its members are not hierarchical and are constantly in flux. AC describes itself as "a support community for those who are wandering and suffering from some kind of eating disorder. People who are lost can get support here." Community interests include: "ana," "anorexia," "anorexia nervosa," "anorexic, beauty, being thin...eating disorder, eating disorders, ed...pretty, pro ana, pro anorexia, pro anorexic, pro ed, pro-ana, pro-anorexia...supermodels, thin, thinspiration, tiny, underweight...weight, [and] weight loss." AC's definitions of anorexia link the group with consumer culture values such as "beauty," "pretty," and "supermodels."

The nine individuals who serve as the subjects in this study of AC bloggers range from 18 to 24 years of age. They include: littlemisspoo (20, Florida), ajonadiet (18, Washington state), xperfectionx07 (23, Kansas), fishgirl415 (18, Florida), mis_ana_thropic (19, USA), skinnybliss19 (20, USA), run4skinny (22, Michigan),
misa_mc (23, Canada), and ed_surreal (24, Arkansas). Wannarexics in AC skew towards the younger end of the age cohort for this research, as the majority of them were born in and grew up in the postfeminist media culture of the 1990s. All the bloggers are women and at least two are women of color: littlemisspoo is African American and misa_mc is hispanic. In addition, users who do post photographs of themselves do not appear to be emaciated, and the general lack of pictorial representation by others indicates (according to Boero and Pascoe 2012) that they do not have emaciated bodies to show. Indeed, they report varying height/weight descriptions, and many state that they are in the "normal" BMI (Body Mass Index) range or are overweight/obese. Still, they have all lost weight (anywhere from 10 to 80 pounds) and seek to lose more (30 or more pounds). The bloggers are similar in age (in their late teens and early 20s), sexuality (those who discuss their sexual orientation identify as heterosexual), and geography (all are from the United States except for misa_mc who is Canadian) (see Figs. 31-37 for images that were available of the bloggers)

While none of the wannarexics identify themselves as morbidly obese, individuals in that group also join online communities to discuss their bodies and bodily labor. But one of the primary foci for them is sharing information on the modern technology of weight loss (bariatric) surgery. This surgery is elective and encompasses a variety of procedures (the most common being Roux-en-Y [gastric bypass] and the lap band) to reduce the stomach and small intestine either permanently or temporarily and minimize the body's ability to digest and absorb food. Bariatric surgery is viewed as a "last resort" (Throsby 2008, 117), but over the last 15 years, it has "becom[e] safer" (Alderman 2010)
due to improved surgical techniques, which have resulted in increasingly lower mortality rates.

Cultural discourses promote weight loss surgery (hereafter referred to as WLS) as a technique that "offer[s] the dual promise of bestowing 'health' and normative appearance, both perceived to be lacking in the 'obese' subject" (Murray 2009, 153). Through WLS, individuals can access self-improvement both aesthetically (as thin) and morally (by taking responsibility for their actions). Thus WLS is more than a solution to the potentially fatal health problems (e.g., diabetes and heart attack) that accompany severe overweight; it is a responsible choice and a medical imperative (Knutsen et al. 2013, 67). Such an undertaking reconfigures the self as a disciplined subject who is able to exercise control and restraint over consumption (Throsby 2008, 120). Thus, WLS patients, as exemplary neoliberal citizens, symbolize triumph over the obesity epidemic (Throsby 2008, 129-130).

The meanings attached to WLS have grown through socially constructed discourses about cosmetic surgery, which are cultivated and spread through economic, political, medical, and social institutions (Pitts-Taylor 2007, 6). Contemporary discourses about WLS merge its meanings with those of cosmetic surgery in ways that reinforce and extend the concept of the inferiority complex, as WLS "is certainly sold like a cosmetic procedure...combining the fat-shaming beauty mandate with the fear mongering Obesity Epidemic language...which appeals to many women who have accepted that fat bodies (including their own) are evidence of inferiority" ("Weight Loss Surgery: A Feminist Issue" 2011). Much like beauty-centered reality television programs that focus on women's physical and emotional labor to achieve a fairytale appearance and life
(romance, fame) (see ANTM analysis in Chapter 3), the decision for and outcome of WLS is perpetuated in the media as a fairytale of weight loss. This message is complicated, however, since WLS is also described in terms ranging from "'drastic' to 'draconian,' from 'last resort' to 'effortless,' from 'quick fix' to 'surgically induced self-control' [that] all connote WLS as cheating" (Wilson 2005, 252). In this discourse of cheating, individuals who undergo surgery are presented as avoiding the hard work of traditional diet/exercise programs, thus reinforcing the notion that the obese person can only become “normal” by taking extreme measures.

Celebrity culture has also played a role in articulating personal and cultural values about cosmetic surgery and WLS, as well as cultivating social acceptability for the latter. As literary historian Virginia Blum contends, in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, the normalization of plastic surgery has been aided by individuals' interpretations of celebrity bodies as aspirational sites to identify with and emulate (2005, 229). The cultivation of one's appearance in these ways reflects "Our 'self-made' culture [which] finds its logical extreme in surgical self-fashioning - becoming a star in our own right" (Blum 2005, 259). In addition, reality television programs contribute to escalating every woman's desire to look like celebrities and become them, particularly shows such as Extreme Makeover and The Swan, which promote cosmetic surgery (Leve et al. 2011, 124; see Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 2006 and Marwick 2010 for further analysis of these shows). In Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity, gender studies scholar Brenda Weber contends that the makeover subject transforms from one who signifies "failed or imperiled selfhood" (2009, 5) to one who presents an "After-body" that expresses a "celebratory state of selfhood" (2009, 7) and supports hegemonic values
(for instance, of femininity) and neoliberal empowerment. The everyday women studied here express postfeminist values as part of their post-operative pursuit of beauty, and their engagement in postfeminist self-branding mirrors that of celebrities and reality television contestants who participate in and support makeover culture.

Popular media and cultural values may incite women to have cosmetic surgery by reinforcing feelings of dissatisfaction with their appearance (Blum 2005) and emphasizing the benefits of having such procedures. Likewise, the representations of celebrities in the mass media and in niche marketing materials (such as medical industry texts on WLS) correspond with its growing popularity and social approval (Boero 2010, 312). Celebrities who have had WLS include singer Carnie Wilson (who had WLS again, more than a decade after her first surgery, after not losing her pregnancy weight), talk show host Star Jones, TV personality Al Roker, comedienne Lisa Lampanelli (who, post-op, is a self-proclaimed "skinny bitch" extolling her love of consumerism), actress Roseanne Barr, television host Sharon Osbourne, reality television judge Randy Jackson, author Anne Rice, National Football League coach Rex Ryan, and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. Many of these celebrities had plastic surgery post-WLS as well.

Comparing Wilson and Roker, Ronald Bishop argues that there is a gendered dimension to media coverage of celebrities who have WLS: Roker is depicted as deciding to have the surgery as a means "to become a better father, son, and husband. He took a very outward, very active stance. Wilson had the surgery...largely to improve her appearance—to satisfy the gaze of others" (2005, 136). In this study, a key concern is how the popular culture context is taken up by users who have had weight loss surgery and seek to discuss the meanings and experience of beauty post-operatively.
Unlike PL and AC, the WLS community was developed primarily by women who searched on YouTube for vloggers who could provide support and information about WLS. Thus members of the YouTube WLS community do not congregate around one YouTube channel. As a non-hierarchical space, members appear to relate autonomously. They participate via their own channels, and they engage with one another by referencing members' stories about their surgery, promoting members' channels, building on themes from others' vlogs, and making response videos to and commenting on others' vlogs. They find each other by using the keywords "weight loss surgery" in the YouTube search bar, or by hearing about the community through people they know online and off. Some of them met in-person at the annual "meet and greet" event convened by the Weight Loss Surgery Foundation of America (WLSFA) and then became vloggers, while others found the community online and then met fellow vloggers offline at the WLSFA event. Users also consistently note that they joined the YouTube WLS community because they were inspired by members' vlogs which then inspired them to have WLS.

Although WLS patients engage with psychologists, nutritionists, surgeons, and support groups (oftentimes affiliated with hospitals or medical practices) pre- and post-surgery, those who participate in the YouTube WLS community seem to be looking for a non-institutionally oriented support group. They likely feel that its members are more open about their weight loss achievements and struggles than those in a doctor/patient setting. In addition, while many acknowledge that they had a support system beyond the medical industry (such as friends and family), they feel an intuitive connection with members of the YouTube community since they know what it feels like to have been fat,
to have made the decision for WLS, and to have experienced the physical and emotional changes post-WLS.

This study focuses on ten subjects (see Figs. 41-60 for screen grabs of the vloggers) who range in age from 24 to 29 years (vloggers' ages were articulated at the time each woman created her channel) and reside in the United States. The subjects include: Jen (24) from New Jersey, Stephanie (28) from California, Nicole (27) from Louisiana, Katie (27) from Missouri, Kristen (29) from Oregon, Martha (23) from the United States (does not identify the state), Debbie (28) from Maryland, Dani (28) from New York, Kelly (27) from the United States (does not identify state), and Micola (28) from Maryland. The vloggers are all women, similar in age, heterosexual, and geographically homogenous (American), though racially diverse (Caucasian, African American, and Latina). The vloggers have all been categorized as morbidly obese according to the BMI and have had significant weight loss (over 100 pounds) post-WLS. They acknowledge themselves and members of the community as WLS-ers either verbally in their vlogs or in their vlog descriptions.

The weight loss community vloggers in this study average 1,967 subscribers, 115 videos, and an overall average number of total video views of 406,000. These women begin vlogging either just before their WLS (1-4 weeks prior to surgery) or immediately afterwards (1-8 weeks post-surgery). When they begin vlogging, they state their aim to post a new video weekly, which generally holds true in the early stages of post-surgery (particularly during the first year post-op). They vlog less -- bimonthly, then every few months, then annually-- as their weight declines and, they note, they have become busy
with active social lives; this also suggests that they depend less on community support as they become thinner.

Analyzing Online Communities

This analysis considers users' postfeminist self-branding and affective communication to unpack their meanings and feelings about beauty/bodies in postfeminist media culture. First, I study women's self-branding by looking at the meanings they express about their beauty/bodies in relation to female power; this hinges on two themes: (1) transformation and self-esteem and (2) self-promotion and narcissism. Second, I examine women's affective communication about their beauty/bodies, particularly regarding beauty as an embodied affect and as an inclination toward hope. At the same time I explore women’s physical and emotional work to transform their bodies as they relate to meanings and practices of self-love.

Postfeminist Self-Branding

Transformation and Self-Esteem

Transformation and self-esteem, as noted in earlier chapters, are important to this study. Transformation, per Hearn (2008a), is integral to the practice of self-branding. Self-esteem is a cultural value that is closely tied to self-improvement, and often to consumption. Themes of transformation and self-esteem are examined as part of users' self-branding by looking at several of Gill's (2007a) themes of "postfeminist sensibility" (identified in italics). Examining the emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring, and discipline illuminates how, in each of the three communities, the body labor of women denotes each group's beauty value. This theme underscores the cultural dominance of the makeover paradigm among these women. At the same time, an analysis of individualism,
choice, and empowerment demonstrates how the labor of women to improve their bodies corresponds with a desire to improve how they feel about their bodies (or, at least, to show that they seek to develop positive emotions regarding their bodies). The juxtaposition of women's pursuit of transformation and their expressions of self-esteem and self-love is considered as part of the neoliberal context.

Of all the groups, WLS-ers demonstrate the most rigorous attention to self-surveillance and self-discipline of the body. These participants describe their journeys to lose weight and make clear that this lifestyle change requires constant labor to construct and present their bodies. Their communication about this process emphasizes their transformation from fat to thin; by succeeding in losing weight, they demonstrate that they are taking responsibility for their health. Choosing to have weight loss surgery indicates that they are hyper-aware of the work required to produce their aspirational bodies and they perform the work that is needed. Many community members express the sentiment that they want their bodies to reflect their identities. For instance, Katie declares, "I thought I was a cute girl and wanted a cute body to match so I decided to have the surgery." WLS-ers readily tell other participants that they want to experience a confident feeling of embodiment. Again, Katie's communication denotes self-love as the reason for her surgery: "You have to do something for yourself [surgery] because you love yourself that much."

However, since WLS-ers appear to uncritically accept the diagnostic tool of the BMI as their guideline for health and size, their assessment of the desirable body is guided by a seemingly objective (numerical) institutional measure rather than their own visual and embodied assessments of their physique. While many women in the YouTube
WLS community had health issues before surgery (e.g., high blood pressure or high cholesterol), they did not express worry pre-op about the physical or economic effects of their obesity. Instead, they emphasized emotional issues, such as restricting their social interactions due to shame over their bodies. As Jen states, "You feel like anytime you see someone laugh, they're laughing at you. Anytime you hear someone whispering, you think that they're talking about you." Their conversations about weight loss surgery thus focus on it as a tool for a socially acceptable body more than a healthy body.

Yet despite the importance of social concerns pre-op, many WLS-ers take a rather clinical approach to describing their post-op body. They detail their weight loss in relation to "scale victories," which are very precise (such as the loss of .5 or .8 of a pound or .25 of an inch in measurements), and they cheer each other on via response videos and user comments. Kelly, for example, provides medical information about the technical aspects of her surgeries (e.g., she shows the doctor's pre-surgery markings on her body where the incisions will be made, details the goals of the procedures, and explains why certain procedures were chosen over others), along with reports about the physical side effects she experienced after surgery. Post-op, she shows her scars, describes her moisturizing regime to minimize scarring, and offers videos such as "things you need to do before/after surgery," which articulate that weight loss surgery is a tool, not a magic trick. In this regard, her vlog "provides legitimacy for the commercial industry to perform such operations and advertise them as a successful way of changing lifestyle....[and] the burden of responsibility falls on them" (Groven et al. 2013). In addition, Kelly's transparency about her procedures offers an explicit education about what to expect pre- and post-op. Accompanying this is her unrelenting discourse on the importance of work
on the self, in which she does not question her reasons for subjecting her body to ongoing surgeries (WLS and, especially, bariatric plastic surgery). Kristen provides a similarly unquestioning narrative in a video titled "Gastric Bypass was my MIRACLE:"

"Everything that I had hoped to accomplish by having surgery, I've accomplished already. My self-esteem has skyrocketed, I was very, very depressed before I lost the weight." She offers a particularly good example of WLS-ers who present their experience of bariatric surgery as a fairytale, albeit one that involves a lot of work post-op.

For most WLS-ers, even miracles require work. Thus they discuss their diet and exercise regimes, emphasizing obsessive attention to their bodies, especially after their operations. The medical establishment stresses that WLS patients must follow strict medical guidelines for diet/exercise in order to minimize post-op complications and maximize weight loss. Thus, they must adhere to rigid eating plans -- wherein a woman will "live the rest of her life as a highly disciplined eater" (Goldberg, Cowan, and Marcus 2006). Also, they are required to participate in increasing levels of physical activity so that they will continue to lose weight. Many WLS-ers begin with walking and ultimately complete the "Couch to 5k" run/walk program.

The WLS diet prescribes low calorie, snack-size portions of nutrient dense foods such as fruits and protein shakes. Some WLS-ers create "what I eat now" vlogs in which they demonstrate how to prepare post-op meals. One involves combining a can of chicken broth with half a carrot and shitaki noodles (made of tofu) which makes 6 servings at 20 calories each. Due to severe limitations on the quantity of food that can be eaten at one time (post-op patients can fall ill if they eat too much food in one meal), detailed planning goes into their daily food consumption: meals and liquid intake are
spread out at intervals, and initially only a few ounces or tablespoons can be consumed at once; thus, their "lived experience...[involves] careful and rigorous attention that makes food the focus of one’s daily activities" (Murray 2010). As noted by Kelly regarding these self-regulatory practices, the constant labor of WLS becomes a mental preoccupation: she reports "thinking about it at every meal, thinking about it while I'm eating, thinking about it when I'm done eating...thinking about it all the time."

Importantly, these disciplinary practices support practices of hegemonic femininity since "the surgically induced inability to eat becomes a parody of 'dieting like a normal person'...[which appears as the] normatively feminine practice of dieting" (Throsby 2008, 127).

Interestingly, though, WLS patients do not necessarily learn to eat well in the context of their medically sanctioned diet and exercise instructions. Due to the sickness that the majority of WLS-ers experience following surgery, post-op patients may find that their surgically devised stomachs are better able to pass food with minimal nutritional benefit (like ice cream) and, therefore, the patient chooses to eat these foods to experience less pain. As Katie relates: "You're excited when you have restriction [initially after post-op] because then you won't be able to eat a lot. But then you start to kind of taper over to unhealthier foods that will go down...chips, ice cream, and I'm horribly guilty of this." WLS-ers may also eat these foods due to habit. Micola echoes that she had some "fat girl moments" post-op, wherein she inadvertently "made herself sick" by eating the foods she enjoyed pre-op, but her post-op body would not digest them. Some WLS-ers try to make more "healthy" food choices, such as hummus or pureed foods, and they also find shortcuts that may be considered in-between "healthy" and "unhealthy," such as
baby food. Kristen advocates that women do their food shopping in the baby food aisle, as the food is soft and low-calorie. In addition to freeze-dried fruit intended for babies, she recommends Gerber Graduates, calling it "cheetos for babies;" these fake cheese puffs have been made soft so that they disintegrate in the baby’s mouth. By developing such food strategies, WLS-ers can maintain their poor eating habits and poor nutrition and still lose weight, indicating that surgery does not ultimately correlate with habits that will improve their health.

WLS patients’ greatest weight loss generally occurs in the first year post-op not only because of high motivation and a physically tight stomach pouch/lap band, but also because "their bodies have adjusted to the calorie restriction inherent in most weight-loss surgeries" (Boero 2013, 120). Thus, caloric restriction, which is generally a common element in traditional dieting programs, is required for continued post-op weight loss. This concerns many WLS-ers, who frequently note their failure at dieting prior to WLS. As Micola describes it, she tried a variety of diets (e.g., Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, and Atkins) and in so doing, "dieted my way to obesity, from overweight to obese." Such an upward shift in weight in the past incites anxiety in the present that they will similarly fail in the post-WLS regime. For some WLS-ers, this means even more heightened attention to and cultivation of motivation for their diet/exercise routine. Some seek out diet pills over the counter or via prescription; for instance, Micola's doctor supplied her with appetite suppressants post-op when she told him that she had "a big appetite" which was complicating her weight loss progress.

Another psychological complication may ensue due to the rapidity of weight loss in the first year. Some WLS-ers do not mentally "catch up" with their thinner bodies
(especially since they may not participate in post-op therapy/counseling), and thus still view themselves as their pre-op fat selves. In this context, some WLS-ers develop eating disorders through extreme self-regulation since it is "unclear where the line between healthy fear and unhealthy obsession lies" (Boero 2013, 120-121). For instance, Nicole went from 250 pounds to 174 pounds, then passed the surgeon's goal of 137 pounds, and lost another 10+ pounds to bring her weight into the 120s. She appeared increasingly emaciated in her vlogs and a few months later admitted that she had been "exercising excessively" and had "gone too far," although she did not share how she came to these conclusions.

Taken together, tremendous work is required to achieve the desired results of weight loss surgery. Although WLS-ers communicate pleasure in having a new attitude of control over their bodies, many of them are unable to experience satisfaction in their sense of embodiment. Many suffer complications from WLS which require more surgery (as in Stephanie's case), or they have issues like dumping (i.e., after eating, they experience intense nausea, diarrhea, cramps, or vomiting), fecal incontinence, hair loss, malnutrition, dehydration, ulcers, gallstones, gallbladder removal, hypoglycemia, fainting, esophageal reflux and spasms, acid reflux, and food regurgitation. Thus, WLS-ers commonly feel that they are living in unhealthy bodies even while enjoying the satisfaction of their thinner appearance. Their experience appears akin to that stated by cultural studies scholar Samantha Murray, whose inquiries about her own weight loss surgery take these contradictions into account: "my more visibly normative (inter)corporeality is continually haunted by a management of internal psychological and physical conflict, a hidden disabled embodiment" (2009, 158). WLS-ers' reported
pleasure about having a normative appearance, then, is constantly challenged by the problematic experience of occupying unhealthy bodies: in general, they feel sick, lack confidence in their bodies' functioning, and constantly nervous about gaining weight. In light of the previous discussion about women having weight loss surgery in order to love their bodies and themselves, this ambivalence about their sense of embodiment indicates emotional suspension: they are waiting to realize self-esteem in the face of their bodies continuing problems, even after the rigorous labor they have exercised.

Unlike WLS-ers, wannarexics' labor to transform their bodies demonstrates more of a peer focus than a relationship to medical experts. Communications about the emaciated body is central to AC, illustrating the postfeminist theme of constant attention to the body. Wannarexics claim that achieving an emaciated body is their goal: "I just want to be able to lie on my back and feel my hip bones rise out on either side of my belly...Is anyone else as obsessed with their bones as I am?" (coinsxandxbones). They also demonstrate that their interest in looking anorexic remains their mission, regardless of their starting weight. For instance, misa_mc minimizes her 70-pound weight loss, in which she "went from a size 16 to a size 8 in about 2 months or less...[and she highlights that she is] still trying to lose [weight]." The shared experience of communicating an anorexia identity appears to be important to wannarexics as motivation for their labor, without which they individually experience "a lack of accountability and support" (coinsxandxbones). While participating as part of this community, their purpose is to achieve the personal goal of transformation, which translates into a new self. As two subjects state: "I'm here on LiveJournal...[for] A new me" (coinsxandxbones) and a "New me is just tomorrow away" (ed_surreal).
Wannarexics consistently articulate efforts to monitor and discipline their bodies in order to move towards their ana vision. They conduct daily and weekly weigh-ins and weight loss challenges, provide emotional support for "being anorexic," and offer advice on weight loss tricks (e.g., types of food to eat, how to exercise for maximum calorie burning). The majority of their posts are akin to weight loss journals, detailing daily calorie intake, the number of calories in each item eaten and burned per day. It is common for wannarexics to set a goal of 300-400 calories daily and to say that they eat foods like "broths and jar baby foods" (ed_surreal) alongside drinking copious amounts of diet coke and black coffee. Statements that they are engaging in fasts (especially water fasts) lasting a few days to lose weight quickly are common. These behaviors echo those described in the posts of anorexics on AC, indicating that wannarexics are attempting to replicate the labor described by those they aspire to become, thereby "enact[ing] online embodiment...through a series of group rituals" (Boero and Pascoe 2012, 31). The major features of wannarexics that matter to this project are: they are not clinically diagnosed with anorexia, yet express a desire to be anorexic and to follow anorexics' diet/exercise plans, as well as to look anorexic, even though they have a higher weight range than anorexics; and they demonstrate an inability to engage in the rigorous labor to fulfill being ana that anorexics do, and this is also what appears to drive their desire for the anorexics' willpower.

Wannarexics continue their self-monitoring through frequent posts (often several times daily) about their current weight and weight loss goals; this obsessive self-regulation frames their worldview. Their descriptions of weight fluctuations are similar to those of anorexics, although they are in very different weight ranges. So while anorexic
redbracelet00 declares, "I'm currently 111 pounds and my ultimate goal is to get back down to 70 lbs," xperfection07 states, "i really need this [AC] because i really am fat...I did weigh 481 pounds...I went down to 302 and back up to 377...I am now currently 368 i have lost 9 pounds in 5 days due to this journey." Wannarexics declare a serious intention to lose weight, approaching it with an ana mindset of dedication: "If no one notices [weight loss] then I'll just have to work harder. And not lose motivation" (ed_surreal).

Revealing that incessant attention to her weight dominates her thoughts, in the same way as it does for an ana, coinsxandxbones is not a lone voice in acknowledging that, "My weight hangs heavily on my mind every single day...[and] I've been sitting around obsessing [about it]" (coinsxandxbones). This unilateral focus on changing the body takes away from other aspects of wannarexics' lives, as skinnybliss19 states: "I just turned 20 and all I can think about is how I feel like I weigh too much. I feel like I should be thinking about all that life has to offer me and how great it is to be 20. But no the only thing I think about is weight, calories, exercising, food, food and more food." For a wannarexic, being ana holds the same meanings as for an anorexic, central to which is an "obsess[ion] with weight...They feel confident if they are losing weight and worthless and guilty if they are not" (Pipher 174). coinsxandxbones's comment upholds the neoliberal value that individuals take responsibility for their actions; in this case, making the choice to lose weight. Additionally, she and others suggest that wannarexics correlate feeling good about themselves with achieving their goal of physical transformation. Their attitude parallels Chazan's definition of self-esteem as depending on the achievement of an objectively observable goal (in this case, a thinner appearance).
Wannarexics freely share their sentiments about how they labor in the style of anorexics, who encourage "feelings of intimacy and sharing...convey[ing] to the site's visitors that they are not alone" (Balter-Reitz and Keller 82) in their weight loss aspirations. A central part of their sharing is cheering each other on when they meet their weight goals: for instance, coinsxandxbones's declares, "Ugh god it's going to feel so good to be out of the 200s" and ed_surreal expresses, "last time i weighed in at 217.6...Just keep in mind i was 231.4. So i think things are starting to look up. I hope to...[get into] the 180s...bit ill [sic] take what ever [sic] i can get."

While anorexics replicate the hegemonic ideal of the thin body, they also serve as visual role models for wannarexics. On their journey to ana, members of AC are expected to register an overall decrease in body weight, and wannarexics regularly express satisfaction with degrees of weight loss (5 lbs, 20 lbs). Their emphasis on constant weight loss is tied to a desire to show to themselves and to the community that they are "good enough" (disciplined enough) to be ana. For instance, fishgirl415 polices wannarexics' language use regarding eating disorders while reinforcing her desire to be ana: "the term 'anorexic' is thrown around too damn much around here in my eyes.

Diagnostically speaking, anorexia is defined as being 85% or less of the expected body weight, and having no period for three months or longer...I want to be good enough to say I'm anorexic." This suggests that, for this community, self-esteem depends on attaining dominant beauty norms (such as "rexy"). Transformation indicates the choice to improve themselves physically and emotionally, thereby positioning them as good neoliberal subjects whose views of themselves improve in alignment with the values of postfeminist media culture.
Posturing about this sort of positivity is so crucial to AC that those who depict the body as flawed are met by readers' efforts to reframe the initial poster's frustration. For instance, run4skinny wrote "Shit shit shit. I've fucking gained. I'm so pissed. And it's not even a little. I went from 139 last week to 143 today. God damn it." Members of the community responded with positivity instead of condemnation, suggesting "just take it day by day...[you'll] do better tomorrow" and commenting that "perhaps sleep will help" her negative emotional state. In turn, run4skinny posted an image that indicated she had chosen to change her emotions about her body. That image (Fig. 38) shows a spiral notebook with thick black uppercase writing that reads "YOU HAVE A CHOICE. YOU CAN THROW IN THE TOWEL, OR YOU CAN USE IT TO WIPE THE SWEAT OFF YOUR FACE." Clearly she had submitted to the community's requirement that its members choose to engage in self-improvement on their bodies and their emotions.

Subsequent to this posting, run4skinny presented a heightened dedication to positive emotional communication that corresponded with her return to losing weight. This expression suggests that taking on the community value of transforming how one discusses the body helped her to become a better "ana." She then posted what looks like a handmade roadmap for what to do (and not to do) to continue the transformation (Fig. 39). It includes directives to "set your alarm to 6:30," stretch before running, and "look in the mirror. Do you like what you see?" The journey culminates in a denotative expression of self-love: written in red ink is the phrase "Do this every day and you will continue to love yourself" over a red heart.

It is possible that their dedication to the philosophy of self-improvement allows wannarexics to continue to participate in the community even when they veer off the
course of their stated diet plans. Wannarexics often speak of "cheat days" that result in weight gain, they break their fasts, and they do not adhere to their diet and exercise programs. As run4skinny relates: "I weighed [myself] and I'm at 143...So I planned to fast today and ended up eating an apple pecan chicken salad from wendy's, with dressing :( So disappointed. So [then] I find out I won a pizza for liking the town's pizza place's facebook page....so i had a breadstick and a slice [of pizza]." A typical wannarexic narrative also discusses the consumption of food that is not on their diet because someone offered it to them: "I'm only 13 hours and 30 minutes into this water fast...Usually I break the fasts because my mom wants to go to lunch or someone wants lunch and I don't say no" (ajonadiet). As these bloggers attest, the wannarexic differs from the anorexic on this important point: she does not "develop elaborate excuses, rationalizations, and behaviors to convince herself and others that nothing is wrong"(Maine and Kelly 81) While the wannarexics in this study aim to present themselves as ideologically similar to anorexics, their body work habits lack the rigor of those they aspire to be. Wannarexics' failure at being anorexic thus reinforces the idea that it takes an immense amount of focused physical and emotional labor to be ana: "I was hating myself cuz I felt like I had screwed up all of my hard work" (fishgirl415).

Looking across the group, wannarexics vary in adherence to their diet plans, with some engaging in the same drastic, self-destructive mental and physical behaviors as anorexics do, albeit without the same degree of self-discipline. And, while some could be viewed as extreme dieters who are able to stop and start "being anorexic" at whim, others are diagnosed with EDNOS. In addition to boomeranging in their food consumption, wannarexics may resort to other measures to lose weight, such as diet pills. As ajonadiet
relates, "I usually take 2 to 3 [diet pills] a day and...I can restrict to nearly nothing when I take them. But on day's [sic] that I do not take them I binge like crazy [2000+ calories per day]." This suggests that for some wannarexics, the desire to be ana is a way of counteracting their feeling of being out of control with regard to their bodies. Ironically, then, their inability to fulfill the desire to be ana is also what drives their desire for the anorexic's willpower. Perhaps wannarexics simply use the claim of wanting to be ana as a strategy to get their weight under control. This is one reason why they "draw anger and derision" (Cohen 2007) from anorexics in the online community, who view them as simply dieters or as "faking" an eating disorder. However, many wannarexics display a will to control their bodies and emotions about their bodies in ways that are simply different than that of anorexics.

By laboring on their minds and bodies to "be anorexic," wannarexics show themselves and others that they are trying to better themselves by adopting self-discipline as a means of fulfilling an image (emaciated, glamorized female bodies) that they believe is desirable in the eyes of others. For instance, connecting possession of an emaciated body with personal happiness, littlemisspoo, at 260 pounds, writes "I always tell myself i am- useless, unhealthy, fat, ugly, stinky, bad, stupid, tired, lazy, pain, flabby, heavy, unmotivated, slow, late, gross...I always want to feel- Loved, happy, beautiful...I never feel- Loved and Satisfied." In this way, wannarexics link self-love with self-esteem in the sense that when they achieve the external social value that they have internalized, they will feel the way that they want to feel. This viewpoint mirrors that of pro-anas on AC who, likewise, connect production and presentation of a socially valued (ultra-thin) body
with their sense of self (which wannarexics reframe as the potential ability to love themselves).

The group that, as a whole, is the least focused on and the least rigorous about transforming their bodies are the fatties, represented on Project Lifesize. However, they do stress transforming their emotions about their bodies to be self-loving instead of self-hating. The community focuses on improving its members' self-esteem through self-evaluation that is based on alignment with the group's values about beauty; as is discussed later, PL's focus also shows the limits of its solidarity. For instance, Meghan says that she deals with "fat heartache" because she wants to be "100% comfortable with my [her] body," which will result in the ability to "love myself [herself], be comfortable in your [her] own skin." She philosophizes that we -- individually and culturally -- "get too caught up in the physical" and advises her viewers to "Love yourself; enjoy who you are." She then elevates self-love over self-acceptance as a response to others' judgments of the fat body: "I think of being accepted into college, a group...you have to meet certain standards...I don't think that you should have to accept yourself, I think that you should love yourself. I think it's so easy to hate yourself...everyone is going to tell you that you don't look a certain way...it's so easy to believe that...it's courageous to love yourself."

Gretchen, likewise, advocates self-love over internalizing others' negative judgments about the need to meet dominant norms about the body: "I judge myself, we all judge ourselves more harshly than other people judge us." This statement is followed by white type on a black screen that reads: "Be who you are, love who you are, and never settle for less." In the above examples, self-knowledge means separating one's own views of the self from the views of others about oneself. This trait of self-esteem is associated with
fatties' self-love, which authorizes neoliberal subjectification: that is, meanings and practices of self-love that sanction neoliberal, postfeminist subjects who base their self-construction on values that are held by other fatties.

Fatties also situate their views on self-love in relation to an ongoing journey. Crystal's complicated narrative about embracing self-love while living in a fat body sounds like a war story: "I think it's hard to love yourself when you feel like other people don't love you, especially when other people treat you like crap. Every day is a battle to love myself, to accept myself...but there are always one or two things that can get to you, and having a fat waddle is one of these things." Locating her body as a site of conflict throughout her vlogs, Crystal elaborates on the dynamics of the battle in relation to other fat bodies: "I have a hard time hanging out with other fat people. Because i don't want to be that fat crew. Because of course I still look down on being fat. Like I'm accepting myself and I'm learning to love myself more and more, but...if you're hanging out with this fat crew, you're, like, this fat crew...I'm just being honest about where I am in my life right now, and with my fatness."

Shan's journey, on the other hand, is one of uplifting emotions culminating in self-love: "I'm going to be accepting, loving, and fully self-aware. I'm going to carry myself better. I'm going to have confidence. And it's going to be real...it's going to be for me loving who I am." Yet she admits that her transformation is gradual and is obscured at times when she slips back into old and negative emotions: "it's the days that I don't feel like loving myself, the days that I feel like hurting myself or representing something that I'm not." Shan's case suggests that emotional self-improvement is both a process and a choice.
Although fatties claim that the fat body is acceptable as-is, PL vloggers nonetheless describe continual monitoring and self-surveillance based on the use of beauty products and fashion. Shan, for instance, frequently talks about the clothes she is wearing and has done vlogs in which she is simultaneously talking and putting on makeup during the entire video. This group sees makeup as supporting femininity. As Meghan says before she provides a tutorial on the beauty products she is using: "So this summer, for some reason, I began to embrace makeup. I don't know why it took me so long to become a girl, apparently." Crystal was the subject of a "Makeup instructional for Project Lifesize" in which she is "transformed" by a friend who details the brands and colors that she utilizes in the makeover. Clothing, similarly, is viewed as a tool to conceal flaws as well as draw attention to a fatty's sexuality. In the following quote, which indicates the kind of attention that goes into self-monitoring, Meghan details specific clothing styles that she views as reshaping her body:

There are a few cute trends coming around for fall. [shows photo] This little floral dress from Evans, it's a British plus label new to the United States, it's kind of wrap style bodice. It kind of gives a long, lean look to the body. We tend to look very good in wrap dresses and things that accentuate the curves [touches breasts] but also hide the problem areas. So, show off a little bit up here [touches breasts] and leave it a little flowy downstairs, just have that perfect hour glass shape. [Shows another photo] This is another look from Sage. Taffeta, it's kind of sexy, yet covered. Enhances the hour glass shape...Other office basics that you'll see at Calvin Klein, Ellen Tracy, AK Anne Klein. You don't want suits that make you just look like a box, you want to enhance the curves...I'm excited for all these trends because it means that there will be more flattering clothing for me and girls that look like me.

Interestingly, fatties do not offer many direct critiques of the perpetuation of ultra-thin women in popular media or fear of the fat female body in popular culture. In the tradition of early activists, fatties proclaim that fat women should accept their bodies.
However, they also sanction neoliberal discourse about obesity. One year into PL's activity, for instance, Meghan posed: "how can you love yourself when all you see in the mirror is double chins, [and] rolls of fat?" This statement suggests that self-love for her, and perhaps for the PL community of which she is the leader, cannot be separated from body size and, further, that it is more easily accessible when inhabiting a body that is without "double chins" and "rolls of fat." Not surprisingly, then, in the last year of PL's activity, Meghan embarked on a diet, focusing her statements upon her choice to do so: "I've come to a point in my life, you know, where I've decided to take control, and I have been getting healthier, I've been exercising and losing weight. Society tells us that we have to look a certain way, and what people don't realize is that people come in all sorts of shapes, all sorts of sizes, all colors, we're all so different."

By positioning her choice in relation to bettering her health rather than dissatisfaction with her body size, Meghan presents herself not as unhappy with her body (that is, she does not hate herself) but rather as laboring to improve herself, thus embracing neoliberal, postfeminist values. Her weight loss decision is based on self-love, which she wants to increase via a "healthier" lifestyle. Meghan's choice to lose weight can also be seen as a struggle to control her own actions, which she considers an expression of self-love free from cultural constraints and a way, simultaneously, to adhere to cultural values that necessitate body work in order to access one’s true self. This suggests that, unlike fat feminists whose empowerment resided in their position that being fat was not their fault, the empowerment of Meghan, a contemporary fatty, resides in her choice to change her body size. In addition, Meghan accepts responsibility for her size; similarly, other vloggers have stated that the production of their bodies is due to
eating poorly or exercising irregularly. Meghan's conflicted communication in which she claims that self-love is both attached to and separate from the body conflates her ideas with notions of self-esteem in which achieving the desirable body is what makes one feel better about oneself.

Across the three groups, women engage in labor that produces meanings and practices of self-love as part of their process of postfeminist self-branding. To sum up, the three groups in this study communicate their journeys of transformation and self-esteem in different ways. The fatties view the body as a site that does not need to be rigorously changed, but present conflicted meanings about changing their emotions about their bodies -- that is, can they love themselves if they sustain a fat body? The wannarexics emphasize engaging in labor to transform the body as well as positive emotional communication about weight loss as the best means to achieve the desired body. The WLS-ers are the most rigorous in transforming the body, yet express emotional discontentment as they continue to be dissatisfied with their bodies. The subjects' different approaches to transformation indicate the contemporary state of postfeminist entanglements, especially regarding self-discipline, personal responsibility, choice and how it relates to loving their bodies and, therefore, themselves; this is discussed more in Chapter 5.

Self-Promotion and Narcissism

This section applies Gill’s postfeminist themes (indicated by italics) -- the *shift from objectification to subjectification* (which includes communication about *femininity as a bodily property*) and the *emphasis on consumerism* -- to understand how subjects in the three groups promote their bodies through consumer culture codes of beauty related
to self-sexualization and self-styling. It also draws on the *articulation and entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas* and the interest of the subjects in micro-celebrity to elucidate how their promotion of beauty values aligns with consumer culture techniques that have commodified feminism and cultivated celebrity images to market specific brands. The juxtaposition of women's self-promotion and expression of narcissism in relation to self-love is examined as part of the practice of postfeminist self-branding. As noted (in Chapter 1), narcissism has characterized contemporary culture, has been connected to feminism in popular and consumer cultures, and is a feature of social media.

Women’s use of media technology, especially when it involves self-promotion of the female body, is an important area for analysis. Some women who participate online are camgirls, who "pose for the cams: They comb their hair and hang out, sometimes half-undressed" (Quart 2004, 175). Additionally, self-promotion, which is central to the practice of postfeminist self-branding, occurs through women's use of technology as a narrative vehicle for self-expression. As Banet-Weiser contends, "Self-branding is thus not just a tired re-hashing of the objectification of female bodies, but rather a new social arrangement that relies on different strategies for identity construction and hinges on more progressive ideals such as capability, empowerment, and imagination" (2012, 69-70).

Like the other two groups in this study, the fatties pay close attention to "the possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity" (Gill 2007a, 255). Being sexy was listed as a requirement for participation on PL, as per Meghan’s casting call: "I want to create a collaborative channel of five women who are beautiful, who are sexy, who are confident, who are smart, who are funny, who
are living life." In response to a subscriber's query of "Why did you put out a call for only 'beautiful and sexy' girls?," Meghan qualifies the above statement, saying: "I didn't mean to infer that I was looking for only the 'pretty' girls. I think that beautiful and sexy can be applied to all women and I don't find physical beauty a necessity to meet those requirements. The girls on the channel were not chosen because they met a certain ideal of beauty. Their inner beauty jumped off the screen." A fatty's expression of sexuality thus appears to be linked to an outward projection of her inner beauty, rather than with a sexual presentation of the physical body alone.

Yet, the titles of many of PL's vlogs communicate that their physical bodies are sexually desirable, and they reference specific body parts. Instead of their names, the vloggers identify themselves by the day of their post. For instance, Meghan posts on Monday and titles one of her vlogs, "Monday is Young, Spry, and Limber," suggesting the qualities of a desiring sexual subject; similar titles include "Tuesday is Boob-tubular," "Thursday is Sexytime," and "Friday is Sexy and Snotty." The vloggers also address each other as "hi sexy," bolstering their claim -- and validating to their users and themselves -- that a fatty is sexy.

Across their vlogs, members of PL seem preoccupied with presenting their bodies in this way as an act of positive self-expression; however, it can also read as communicating a postfeminist attitude of empowerment wherein female audiences “must also now understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self-chosen” (Gill 2008b, 45). Their sexual language is oftentimes accompanied by a sexual self-display: they frequently wear revealing tank tops with thin straps or tube tops, and suggestively frame their images so that viewers see only their faces and shoulders while proclaiming
that they are actually "vlogging naked." This state of undress does not go unnoticed by users, who make comments to vloggers like, "Why is your top always falling off?" While this suggests some discomfort on the part of the viewers, such self-portrayals are offered by vloggers as connoting that they are comfortable in their own skin and not concerned with others' judgments of their bodies. And most users affirm this view with comments such as: "You're so sexy. Get it, gurl!!" and "You one of the sexiest YouTubers I know...Own your body, and keep rocking it like you do." Overall, members of the PL community endorse the subjects' sexual self-presentation, reinforcing excessive admiration of the bodies that the subjects appear to desire. More than sexual objectification alone, the fatties place a heightened value on demonstrating that central to their sense of self is affirmation of themselves as having a sexually desirable body.

As much as the subjects are interested in themselves and in others focusing on their bodies, they often break away from their apparent narcissistic gaze to look at other bodies, especially those of men. In so doing, they uniformly connect their sexuality with heterosexuality. They commonly discuss their interest in men in the context of someone who they are dating (e.g., Crystal constantly discusses a flame named Robert) or proudly have a one-night stand with ("Lol I take pride I'm being a whore!"). The women are careful to note that the men they engage with are "normal;" that is, they are not Fat Admirers who view fat bodies as a fetish. Along these lines, vloggers disdain feederism, wherein sexual arousal develops through a feeder encouraging a feedee's overconsumption of food (Terry and Vassey 2011). Instead, the vloggers point to chiseled male celebrities as aspirational sexual partners. They even objectify them; for instance, Meghan eager.ly describes photographs of Twilight franchise star Kellan Lutz, declaring
"He's nice to look at. He's a fine male specimen, and I enjoy him in the clothes...but I also enjoy this one [shows photo of his abdominals]...Let's be honest, I'm really not looking at his face in most of these photos, I'm looking at the rest of him, but I'm sure that his face looks good, too." These sorts of sentiments, common among the PL community, indicate support for desiring hegemonic masculine bodies while, at the same moment, refusing to conform to hegemonic notions of female bodies and femininity.

While the subjects present a fantasy of sexuality that endorses heterosexuality and a partner who embodies hegemonic masculinity, threaded throughout these conversations are stories of previous relationships with men who criticized their bodies and thus made it more difficult for the women to love themselves. They make it clear that they are constantly working to get over the past. Articulating enjoyment with their sexuality as a fatty rebuffs the idea that fat women, as they comment, are "expected to not have a sex life" and, moreover, suggests that they can have "better sex lives than skinnies." To support their case, their vlogs promote a recent study by a researcher at Texas Christian University that "fat women reported better sexual experiences after embodying the ideals of fat acceptance" (Littlefield 2012).

Still, fatties do express ambivalence about weight loss and sexuality in relation to romantic love. Meghan argues that "if a guy could love me now the way that I am he could love me anyway. I'm scared that if I get skinny and become the social norm...I wouldn't know who would really love me or care about me for the right reasons beyond just a physical attractiveness." Feedback from members of the PL community support her concerns while also reinforcing the value of loving themselves in order to be loved by others: "i understand you, and u have a good point, acceptance really sounds like
reaching some standards first, but there are no standards, there is just love, loving urself [sic], and others loving the real us, just the way we are :D" and "I know what you mean, as a curvy/plussize/bbw woman, I have that identity, but If I were thin, I'd just be another woman." The nature of this conflict suggests that PL's support of the fat body is both a way of presenting themselves as more unique than "skinnies" and a device to weed out men who are superficial and only interested in women for their attractive bodies.

PL also talks about pornography, especially BBW (Big Beautiful Women) pornography. Crystal is the outlier in taking a critical approach to porn, stating, "Porn in general doesn't help women in any way...it kind of objectifies women as sexual objects." But others claim that pornography offers a way for women to celebrate their bodies and sexuality. Thus Gili notes, "I'm sort of fascinated by porn...I think inherently it's not a bad thing." Expanding on this point, she argues that BBW porn broadens the representation of fat women: "BBW porn is good because it shows another type of woman, because it shows that plus size women can be sexy and sexual." She then celebrates the book Naked on the Internet about online sex workers, calling it "good stuff." Taking a similar perspective, Meghan wishes that fat women were included in mainstream pornography, rather than as a fetish: "I'm not actually offended by porn, specifically BBW porn, the fetishization of bigger women...the thing that shocks or kind of annoys me is that you can't have a lead actress in a porn film...without it being BBW porn."

PL advocates that fatties constantly present their sexuality and their sexualized bodies in the media, even in formats that have a history of objectifying women. This position is set against the backdrop of the "Feminist Sex Wars," which pit feminist critiques of pornography - notably, those of Andrea Dworkin, Gail Dines, and others --
against views of sex-positive feminists. Embracing subjectification as a variation of sex-positive feminism, fatties recognize that their bodies, like raced and ethnic bodies that do not signify the dominant ideology of female beauty, circulate in consumer culture as "physically aberrant, sexually desirable, and consumable by the mainstream" (Guzman and Valdivia 213).

WLS-ers are second to fatties in their preoccupation with presenting their bodies as sexualized. Based on their initial vlogs, pre-op photos, and conversations, pre-op WLS patients do not present visual codes that align their appearance with hegemonic beauty. Their clothing generally covers their bodies, most wear minimal makeup, and their hair is not "done" (generally, it is worn down, around their faces, without much styling). As they lose weight, however, they present themselves as increasingly sexual and self-objectifying, signalling the embrace of postfeminist subjectification. Nicole, for example, creates vlogs that are comprised of selfies in which she wears clothing that is coded as sexual, such as low-cut animal print dresses (Fig. 61); selfies have been identified as a "narcissistic act of snapping a self-portrait and uploading it onto the internet for other human eyeballs to consume...indulging in the latent urge to 'check yourself out' and share the results with everyone you know" (Gayomali 2013).

In their "journey through pictures" and over the course of their vlogs, WLS-ers progressively show off their bodies in clothing that is more feminine (such as strappy tank tops, dresses, and skirts) than they wore pre-op (like t-shirts and pants). It shows skin (especially around their breasts) and is tight-fitting (see "post-op" images in Figures that illustrate this finding). Although WLS-ers state that one reason they create their vlogs is to document their changing bodies, the vlogs are also spaces for viewers -- who
include vloggers in the YouTube weight loss community, users who follow vloggers and are considering weight loss surgery, users who are post-op but do not vlog themselves, and users who may surf into the community -- to see their bodies. Through these texts, WLS-ers' pre- and post-surgery bodies become objects for personal and audience viewing. It is notable that after they have lost 50+ pounds and are closer to their goal weight, WLS-ers like to take "full body shots," wherein they walk a few steps back from the camera and spin around with a big smile to present their bodies to the viewer. These shots highlight postfeminist values self-sexualization, particularly when they have also undergone bariatric plastic surgery (see below for more discussion), and their full body shots show them wearing scant clothing, such as bikinis and bras/underwear, on an otherwise naked body. Following this group's mandate, WLS-ers want their changed bodies to be seen. Whether such self-display is intended for personal knowledge about their progress (i.e., for themselves to see their transformed shape), for obtaining feedback from the audience (i.e., to see user comments about their transformed body, particularly their newly normative beauty), or both suggests a line for future research.

WLS-ers stress that getting positive attention from men, including admiration, factored into their decision to undergo bariatric surgery. In a video titled "Gastric bypass 'fantasys' [sic] of life after surgery," Jen offers a representative statement about this issue: "For once, I'd like to be gawked at. I work in an office of all men...they'll see a girl out in the lobby...and they would all flock out there just to look at her. And it would be nice for something like that to happen to me" post-op. Something like that did happen for Kelly, who became confident enough after surgery to date and subsequently got married. Kelly interpreted her pre-op size as a way of removing herself from the male gaze: "When I
was fat, I did everything in my power to avoid attention and dating. In fact, one of the
biggest reasons that I stayed heavy was to keep people away from me. I didn't want
people to be attracted to me...I intentionally dressed very unflattering...I used to wear
men's jeans, and hoodies all the time, and never makeup and my hair looked like crap,
and it was like I did everything I could to make myself look ugly." Yet she decided to
have the surgery because of a seemingly latent desire to be the object of men’s gaze. For
her and WLS-ers, enjoyment of male admiration seems to signal pleasure in "the sexual
objectification that may come with losing weight" (Boero 2013, 106).

Yet for WLS-ers (as for many people), the sexual display of their slimmed
physiques does not necessarily correspond with body confidence. For instance, in one
video, "My 100 lb weight loss SEXY Victory Dance...lol," Debbie lip synced and made
suggestive facial expressions and body movements (cupping her breasts, putting her
fingers in and around her mouth), mimicking the moves of pop stars. In a similar vein,
when she lost a total of 160 pounds, Debbie created a video titled "Giving you some
'sexy'...lol" wherein she posted images of herself made up and seemingly naked (see Fig.
62). While this newfound sexual self-representation may denote empowerment, the
accompanying "lol" (which stands for "laugh out loud") in Debbie's video title suggests
an underlying uncertainty. She is not alone in this, given the many experiences of fat
shaming shared by WLS-ers. Debbie's self-representational strategy suggests that, for the
WLS-er, self-love (which is associated by them with their sexuality) is predicated on
confirmation by others that her body is, indeed, sexy, not laughable.

While the wannarexics also associate self-love with having a "sexy body," this
relationship is present to a lesser degree than in the other groups studied. Upholding
glamorized representations of the emaciated body as their beauty ideal, wannarexics aim to appear "rexy," like the iconic fashion model Kate Moss (see Chapter 3). Rexy conveys a sexually empowered appearance underpinned by an unhealthy body. Interestingly, one AC user, who is over 200 pounds, has the username xxrexyxx.

Wannarexics revere thinspiration; they upload photos of sexualized, emaciated models in various states of undress as profile pictures or in the body of their posts, thereby constructing their online representations to convey their interests and/or physical aspirations. Wannarexics enjoy appearing rexy themselves, signalling it as a means through which they are able to incite the envy of others. ed_surreal, who described her experiences of gaining weight after her recovery from anorexia, is now EDNOS and participates in AC to "be anorexic again." She notes people's reactions to her body at its different weights: "when I was at my LW [lowest weight] of 88 [pounds] I was treated so so different...I miss walking up to the club doors all sexy and not only getting picked out of the line but getting in for free." Wannarexics sustain the beauty industry's value for and appearance of rexy, which is communicated through personal endorsement of its commodities, as ajonadiet writes, with a degree of entitlement: "I need to be skinny. I need to look sexy in my Hollister yoga shorts."

Wannarexics in AC support the postfeminist dictate that links sexual empowerment with self-objectification and heterosexuality. fishgirl415 communicates pleasure at being an object for her boyfriend to seize and excessively admire, and her labor on her body is reinforced by this admiration when she presents herself for his gaze: "Ryan made a comment that made me quite happy earlier. I was talking about going to the beach and me being in a bathing suit, and he's like ok, but I reserve the right to
threaten any guy who stares, and I liked [sic] died inside from happiness....I love possessive Ryan...anywho, I gotta fix myself for Ryan coming home. Ten days until he gets here. I have like nine pounds to lose before then. Hardcore restricting." Wannarexics also strive to immortalize their bodies in sexually explicit and/or suggestive positions and dress (either lingerie or a state of undress) for their male partners. For instance, run4skinny wants to lose weight to model in photographs that she can give as a gift to her husband: "Currently I am 147lbs and my husbands birthday is in January. I plan on doing a boudoir photo session for him for his birthday. So with that I cannot weigh 147lbs. I need to drop a lot of weight by then so I'm here" participating in AC.

Wannarexics may realize self-identification as ana by being able to present their bodies in these contexts as desirable objects, posturing as if they are fashion models. They do not talk about themselves as enjoying their sexuality, but as loving themselves via men's love for their bodies. However, the obsession with their weight suggests that they are not necessarily confident in their bodies, as skinnybliss19 relates: "I'm constently [sic] thinking about if other peoplr [sic] think I'm fat. It even gets in the way of my sexual life with my boyfriend."

Consumerism is another postfeminist vehicle through which subjects promote their bodies. In this area, WLS-ers, more than the other two groups, demonstrate a fervent value for consumerism in several ways. Their weight loss leads to an increased interest -- even a fixation-- in being a consumer. Katie, who went from a size 3x to a size 8, proclaims that post-op, she "can shop at ANY store I want...I am HAPPY." Losing weight afforded her the opportunity to indulge in the items she wanted, and she now "appreciate[s] shopping more, and hair and makeup and all that fun stuff." Once women
enter "the onederland" (the 100s weight range), they are happy that they are able to wear "cute" clothes. Jen describes shopping for her post-op body, declaring that it is easier to find clothes now that she is thinner, and she excitedly looks forward to buying clothes when she is at her goal weight. The women detail their consumption at relatively inexpensive, mass appeal stores like Old Navy and Fashion Bug. WLS-ers communicate that they are shoppers because of need as much as desire, since as frequently as they buy clothes for their reduced physiques, they outgrow them due to rapid weight loss. Oftentimes, they purchase items for their current and anticipated size (even when they "can't button them" yet, as Jen states). The titles of many vlogs suggest a connection between their weight loss and consumerism, such as: "55 Pound Weight Loss...A Fashion Show," "Shopping Trip," and "Update from my Shopping Trip."

WLS-ers also support the medical industry as ongoing consumers. As an elective procedure, weight loss surgery is not always covered by insurance, in which case it costs between $18,000 and $35,000 (Taylor and Muscara-Finnerty 2009). If it is covered by insurance, there is generally a deductible of $5,000 (Taylor and Muscara-Finnerty 2009). There are other out-of-pocket costs such as pre- and post-surgery nutritional counseling and psychological counseling, which may also not be covered by insurance. Kelly and Kristen, who did not have health insurance, went abroad for their surgeries, while Micola's health insurance covered some surgeries (gastric bypass and lap band) but not others (the gastric sleeve).

Significantly, many WLS-ers seek bariatric plastic surgery after significant weight loss (generally, over 100 pounds), and these procedures are not uniformly covered by insurance (Taylor and Muscara-Finnerty 2009). However, it is more likely to be covered
if the surgery is reconstructive in nature (i.e., required to ameliorate a health problem) as opposed to cosmetic "surgery designed to make you look better" (Gitt and Heffel 2013). If finances are an issue, these women try to find a way to have it done, like going to a plastic surgeon abroad or negotiating low interest financing agreements with their doctor's office. Post-op cosmetic procedures, which they term "plastics," that may not be covered include removing extra skin on the pelvis, torso, and arms; abdominoplasty to tighten the abdominal muscles; breast lift and reduction; lower-body lift on thighs and buttocks to pull the thighs and buttocks upward; face lift and neck lift to tighten skin in those areas.

WLS-ers view cosmetic surgery as an important remedy for constructing their desirable body and a pleasurable experience of the self. For instance, Stephanie said about her plastic surgery: "For the first time since my boob job, I've been able to actually wear cute clothes...to go out on the town and feel good about myself." Kelly had total body contouring (which includes most of the aforementioned procedures) as well as dental work and Lasik vision correction. Micola and Debbie both stated that they have a desire for plastics, and are saving money to have abdominal work and total body contouring, respectively. Debbie is passionate about taking advantage of these additional procedures to construct her body, declaring, "I definitely, definitely, definitely, want to have my arms done, breasts done, I want a lift and an augmentation...I also want to get my tummy done, I would love to get everything done. But the first thing I want though is my arms, because I love wearing tank tops and stuff now...having a 240 pound weight loss is not pretty on the upper arms."
Weight loss surgery was the first, not the last, step that these women took toward transforming their bodies although none of them discussed having plastic surgery prior to this procedure. Following the surgery, however, they entered into the closely related consumer/medical industry, bariatric plastic surgery, where "total body contouring cosmetic surgery costs...could be approximately $30–50,000" (Morgan 2011, 194). WLS-ers who undergo and continue to pay for operations to obtain their desirable bodies mirror plastic surgery patients for whom "the surgical re-fashioning of their bodies becomes a never-ending process, as they engage in an impossible search for an identity which is forever beyond reach" (Negrin 2002, 38).

WLS-ers seem to dole out money to make themselves look similar to the masses. They want their bodies (and, therefore, themselves) to fit in, and they clothe themselves in items that enable them to blend in with the crowd. This is executed, moreover, through presenting themselves with the accoutrements of hegemonic femininity. WLS-ers thus pay to fashion their bodies into socially acceptable products. Through this dual interaction, WLS-ers position themselves as conformists to consumer culture who reject uniqueness in favor of a socially normative appearance and value system.

Finally, WLS-ers demonstrate heightened relations with popular media. In some cases, their relations to the media mean taking significant meanings from it; Dani, for instance, announces that Keri Hilson's song "Pretty Girl Rock" is her "anthem" because the song is about "being beautiful, and understanding who you are...I don't have a problem with looking good, or wanting to look good all the time....I want to feel more beautiful" post-op. WLS-ers also note that seeing the images of and reading in magazines about celebrities who have lost weight through bariatric surgery or non-surgically
through diet and exercise motivates them to continue on their weight loss journeys. They are also fans of beauty and weight-centered reality television shows, and, in particular, are fans of *America's Next Top Model* and *The Biggest Loser*. Kristen applied to be a contestant on *The Biggest Loser* and received interest from the casting producer but did not get on the show; if she had, she says, she would not have had weight loss surgery as she felt that the trainers' rigorous regimens on *Loser* were her last resort to lose weight non-surgically.

Taking the narratives of such reality television shows into the production of their own vlogs, WLS-ers visually depict the WLS process of transformation through before/after photographs in their videos, which the women call a "journey through pictures." These self-produced texts feature them as the star, and their image is shaped around the presentation of and discussions about their body. The vlogs oftentimes combine pictures and writing to document their changing weights, accompanied by music that characterizes their emotional shifts over the course of their weight loss. For instance, at the beginning of the video, solemn and slow-paced music complements pictures of fat bodies, but by the end of the video, upbeat and fast paced music announces pictures of transformed, thinner bodies. These texts present a fairytale of WLS transformation in which happiness seamlessly intertwines with the realization of their socially acceptable body. The WLS-ers' production of these texts, then, mimics "what is most strongly foregrounded in popular representations of weight loss (and bariatric surgery promotion) …[which is] the use of the ubiquitous 'before and after' photographs to document the supposed shift from a devalued, pathological 'fat' body, to a newly normative (gendered) one" (Murray 2009, 165).
WLS-ers' vlogs situate the women as actively pursuing their ideal bodies, as more secure in themselves because their body is closer to the ideal, and as thus validating the lifestyle choice required to be a WLS-er: one who wants to be an "after." Personalities in popular culture texts such as *The Biggest Loser* and *Extreme Makeover* offer aspirational visual and lifestyle models to WLS-ers. These personalities represent what they want to look like and what they want their lives to become, that is, people who no longer are constrained by their bodies. WLS-ers draw on representations in makeover television, whereby they (like the participants on reality shows) engage in "surveillance as care" (Weber 2009, 94), which "serves a caring function, since video images are meant to offer subjects visible evidence that will first shame and then shatter Before-ignorance, thus leading to After-enlightenment" (Weber 2009, 96). Along these lines, WLS-ers use digital media technology to capture their bodies before weight loss, bodies which they have hated, viewed as flawed, and felt shame about. The same technology is then used to show a change in lifestyle, which resulted in weight loss as well as enlightenment about the habits and circumstances that led to their "before" bodies. WLS-ers attachment to codes of consumer culture and consumerism promotes a "sky is the limit" attitude about their bodies, indicating preoccupation with a fantasy of unlimited success regarding beauty.

Fatties on PL also place immense emphasis on consumerism. One primary way in which they do so is by advocating that women should validate that they love their bodies by buying fashionable plus size goods and, of course, showing them off on their persons. In the majority of the subjects' videos, vloggers lament their negative experiences of shopping and how they were turned around when they found out about plus size stores,
plus size fashion lines, or mainstream stores that have plus size sections. They encourage material consumption to their viewers, emphatically posting lists of plus size stores on their vlog and discussing the items in these stores that they want to or have purchased, oftentimes with an accompanying photograph or announcement that they are wearing them. As a framework for their purchasing decisions, vloggers (especially Crystal) promote the book *Size Sexy: How to Look Good, Feel Good, and be Happy at any Size and How to Never Look Fat*. Although one user comments that "of course its better not to depend on validation from others to love oneself, but when it helps (and of course it does) its good!," for most users consuming goods that make you happy and feel better is associated with self-love.

A common narrative among fatties focuses on their shift away from viewing their bodies as flawed. Instead, they seek to enjoy their appearance, which is facilitated by wearing the "right clothes," defined as fashionable. They acknowledge that viewing other fat women in stylish clothes has been "life affirming" and "inspirational," as one VOTW proclaims:

I spent a lot of time really, really just not liking who I was, not liking my height, not liking my size...[but then I found the online FA movement and saw] just so many gorgeous girls wearing clothes that I could only dream of wearing but they were my size and they looked like me and it became a really, really big thing for me to where I had strings and strings of bookmarks of all these...things that were being showcased in stores and wishing I had thousands upon thousands of dollars to pay for all these clothes.

While her relief at being able to find clothes that she takes pleasure in wearing should not be minimized, the importance of clothing as part of fatty identity needs to be carefully considered since focusing on the "right" clothes links fantasies of satisfaction with one’s body to consumerism.
Many vloggers align fatty identity with being a "fatshionista," a word that is part of the online FA movement. It plays on "fashionista," a popular term that McRobbie connects with women who exemplify postfeminism (2008, 67) by presenting themselves as paying obsessive attention to fashion trends and consuming brand-name goods. A fatshionista extends on this self-construction by taking immense pleasure in consuming—virtually or literally—plus size fashions. Many of the vloggers also refer to the plus size fashion industry as "the fatshion industry," which is their space for shopping and seeing models that "look like me [them]." Crystal calls for PL members to enter a modeling contest for the plus size brand Torrid, remarking that this is an opportunity to be visible in popular culture, be admired by FAs for breaking through that barrier, and portray "fat beauty." Plus size retailers Lane Bryant, Torrid, and Avenue, in particular, are recommended as shopping destinations. Additionally, having places to shop engenders a sense of "pride," which is associated with sexuality. As one fatty claimed, "I was so excited and felt quite sexy walking past" a plus size store. PL's meaning of pride is distinct from those of the 1960s, during which pride was associated with the collective identity of marginalized groups (such as black pride and gay pride). Instead, fat pride in PL highlights preoccupation with the self, who gains a sense of pride by seeing oneself accepted and legitimized by the plus size industry, a consumer enterprise.

As ideological and material consumers who benefit from the plus size fashion industry, fatties turn the cultural rejection they have experienced into self-love by becoming desirable commodities for the beauty industry. Their discussions express pleasure in being "commodity signs" for plus size brands (for instance, "I'm a Torrid Girl!"). By embracing these commodity signs, they engage in a process of self-branding
through which they willingly identify with a homogenized corporate categorization that proclaims they are understood and embraced. By wanting to be fatshionistas or plus size models, they also reinforce the existence of an aspirational form of fat beauty. By doing so, they create problematic dynamics between institutional meanings of fat beauty and fat audiences, who may pursue this new commercialized idea as an acceptable ideology.

Underlying a fatty's relationship to consumer culture is a desire to feel like she finally fits in with a beauty norm (even if it is not the same norm as for thin beauty). Or, as Samantha Murray writes, "The fat body of [contemporary] fat politics...[wants to be situated within] reaffirmations of normative frameworks (through parading around in a bikini, or donning a g-string). In this way, fat politics still privileges the thin and attempts to imitate it. As fat girls we still want to know what it is to be thin, even if we do not want to alter our fat" (2005, 161). By working to be empowered through fatshion (despite the danger of becoming slaves to fatshion), "fatties" support the plus size industry and its techniques (including branding and self-branding), and thereby gain access to experiences of social acceptance by participating in consumer culture like a "skinny."

Of all the groups, wannarexics show the least emphasis on consumerism. However, integral to the wannarexics' discourse about consumerism is their desire and intent to buy smaller size clothes. They excitedly discuss purchasing increasingly smaller sizes as prizes for reaching their weight loss goals. As ed_surreal articulates, she "put on the pants I had gotten as inspiration...they were only two sizes to [sic] small when I got them...now imma [sic; I'm going] have to do it again...but this go around, I think I'm going to go for ones that are size 9. That's more then two sizes to [sic] small...I'm saving money for jeans that aren't cheap....For every 20 [pounds] I drop in weight, I drop 100 for
my clothing spree" (ed_surreal). Wannarexics derive pleasure from weight loss and want to show off their slimmer bodies in new clothes, which are not "cheap" and are purchased in sprees of hyperconsumption.

Wannarexics are concerned with bodies; that is, the size and shape of each body part. Their desire to be ana is centered on reproducing the appearance of the ultra-thin body, which they break into pieces. A significant thematic in wannarexics' posts is thinspiration, images which originate in consumer culture (particularly of ultra-thin models/actresses/celebrities). Their intense focus on these aspirational images indicates a form of objectification of specific body parts rather than objectification of women as a whole as sex objects. Generally, thinspiration images present bodies that are naked or bony female body parts (see Fig. 40). The posting of these images indicates support for the beauty industry's technique of fragmenting female bodies, so that they are nothing more than objects for the viewer to gaze upon (Bordo 1993; Kilbourne 2000). The thinspiration images selected by wannarexics (including women of color) also reinforce the postfeminist representation of Caucasian beauty, indicating their pursuit of the dominant ideology of beauty. Importantly, they do not critique these images, although they do express awareness about the conflicting cultural messages that stigmatize and glamorize the emaciated body.

Gill alerts us to another key theme--the articulation or engagement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas—important to our analysis of the three online communities. In some cases, their blogs and vlogs also resonate with Senft's views of micro-celebrity. Complicated meanings and practices of self-love emerge from this self-promotion as they relate to consumer culture values and strategies of empowerment, as discussed next.
Fatties on PL communicate far more about political/feminist activism than the other two groups in this study. Referring to themselves as a "fatty" continues the trajectory of fat feminists reclaiming of language (fat, fat power, etc). PL, though, goes beyond recouping a word to encouraging a whole new identity. This suggests the kind of "feminist linguistic resistance…[that] coin[s] new terms to express women’s perceptions and experiences" (Ehrlich 139).

In her casting call video, Meghan expresses vulnerability by telling her viewers about the anti-fat sentiments that have been directed at her, such as "I'd kill myself if my daughter was as fat as you are," "Your parents don't love you," and "Fat ass." Then, she looks directly to the camera and declares: "See, now you pissed Meghan off. And we all know what happens when you piss Meghan off. She makes a video." Following this statement, photos of Meghan appear accompanied by the words "Time for a Change." Towards the end of the video, she declares, "being overweight does not limit us from being full human beings." Through these devices, Meghan presents herself as an agent of social change regarding others' perceptions of the fat female body.

In several ways, PL vlogs express an interest in consciousness raising efforts about fatness, which may be why it is categorized under "nonprofits and activism" on YouTube. Megan, as creator and leader of PL, positioned the channel in this category when selecting its settings. Gili mentions that the popular blog Feministing (comprised of third wave feminists) supported PL in a post on their site when it first began. Another popular young feminist website, The F Word, also wrote in support of the channel. According to Meghan, PL generates female kinship from which women produce "a dialogue about not weight acceptance, but self-love." In addition to suggesting PL as a
catalyst for the realization of women's self-love, this effort is positioned as a contemplation on the social norms of appearance and acceptability, as per Meghan: "This [channel] is bigger than just...talking about boys, and hair, and fashion....[we] are addressing the image that people have of what women should look like...what people should feel like in our society."

PL makes fat women visible and gives them control over their representations by enabling them to create their own vlogs. More, it affords them an opportunity to have conversations about the fat body and self-love in a safe space. Meghan believed that PL would fill a void for her as well as for "other people that felt like I did that being a certain size or looking a certain way...[did not correspond to] how loveable they are or their ability to love and I wanted more of that in the world." Online comments suggest that PL's message attracts an audience; as one user notes in response to Meghan's vlog on "Fat Positivity, "my friends and I last night were all talking about how we were really big and needed to lose weight and we hated our bodies. But you're exactly right. learn to love your body....Thanks (:"

PL's activism is specific to one non-profit organization: Girls, Inc. In a video resembling an advertisement, the vloggers speak about this organization against the backdrop of a song composed and sung by Meghan. Gretchen declares, "Girls, Inc is amazing and it gives girls of all ages a light in the darkness where you can learn to be bold, strong women." Gili follows up with, "I am psyched about this organization, Girls Inc. I think that its campaigns and its message and its mission are all so important today. And I think that there can never be enough organizations that really promote girls voices." Fatties often say, "If I could have a conversation with myself when I was a little
girl" and then finish the sentence differently. For instance, they might finish the thought with: "curly red hair, freckles and glasses are beautiful too," "forget about the stupid beauty standards that are so stifling to you and just oppress any other thinking," and "you can succeed no matter what, you are beautiful." Users acknowledge the ideological links between PL and Girls, Inc., proclaiming, "I love this video, not only [do] you support the organization but you also stand up for precious values, I just love it. YOU are beautiful! Thank you!"

PL's approval of Girls, Inc., a "self-esteem partner" in the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (see Chapter 3), indicates that fatties may be willing to support a non-profit joining with a profit-making corporation to realize female empowerment. In this relationship, Dove and Girls Inc. are presented as saviors of the girls while minimizing the powerful roles of mothers, sisters, mentors, and girls themselves in developing and maintaining a positive sense of self. PL's video is similar to the Campaign's "True Colors" text in proclaiming that females should be "bold" and "strong," and that their voices should be heard. Yet, the message is watered down by the advice that the fatties give and the concerns that they address as part of their "conversations" with their younger selves. They support hegemonic beauty at the same time as they call the dominant beauty standards "stupid" and endorse beauty as "red hair, freckles, and glasses." It is important to compare this comment with the image of red hair and freckles employed to represent "real beauty" in the Campaign (see Fig. 19). None of these characteristics have anything to do with celebrating the fat female body, but they suggest that self-esteem references the body as a whole. At the same time, linking these traits via the "real beauty" campaigns reinforces postfeminist self-branding, which is embodied in the CFRB red
haired, freckled, eye glass-wearing model. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in a different video, Meghan says, "I wish that everyone in the entire world knew the meaning of real beauty. That it comes from the inside. And it is the only type of beauty that really matters." Does this suggest that her view of self-love equates with Dove's value of "real beauty," and she embraces the postfeminist activism employed by the Campaign as a branding strategy? This contextual analysis of postfeminism and its subjects indicates a positive response to that question.

In all the online communities, there are moments of overlap between user statements and the cultural figures of postfeminism. This occurs linguistically, as in the above example of Meghan and in an AC member's username (xxrexyxx). It also occurs in a WLS-er's (Stephanie) replication of a narrative from the reality television makeover genre when referring to her After-body: "It's just amazing, I am a totally completely different person now because my body is different. It's just completely amazing."

There is also a sense among the PL vloggers of women as vulnerable and of the community creating a sense of intimacy much like consciousness raising groups did for women in the 1970s. Both helped women accept and even learn to love themselves, although consciousness raising groups were also critiqued for turning women's focus inward rather than outward to created change in the world. The dilemmas for fatties seem to focus instead on the distinctions between self-acceptance and self-love. For instance, Crystal's conflict about self-love seemed to strike a chord with subscribers. She said:

Self-acceptance, self-love, they're pretty similar but they're pretty different. You can think that you have them but maybe you don't. Because you trick yourself, or you make yourself think you do but you don't. Self-acceptance lets me get up in the morning and have a good day and I think self-love...comes more, like, getting up earlier in the morning and working out when i don't feel like it because I love myself enough to put myself
through something that I don't want to do... when you're a certain weight, it's a hole, and it's hard to get out of that hole. Self-love is a stupid thing. I think it's hard to love yourself when you feel like other people don't love you, especially when other people treat you like crap. Every day is a battle to love myself, to accept myself... but there are always one or two things that can get to you, and having a fat waddle is one of these things.

Subscribers' feedback on Crystal's statements was unanimously positive. The comments included the following: "Wow this video was incredibly honest and pure. I have to say I have been there too and you are the bravest person i know! :-()," "Lovely post, the tears made my heart ache. I totally can relate to what you're saying," "It's a long, laborious, difficult process, but self-love can be achieved," "Aw Crystal, everything you said in this video is exactly how I feel in my life, except I never really know how to put it into words like you do. It's so hard not to define yourself by the number on your jeans when everybody else seems to define you that way," "I know how u feel. It sucks. It's easy to say love ur [sic] self to people who don't deal with issues we deal with, it0s [sic] hard I know. I think i started to love my self [sic] the day I decided that my scale number wont define me, and started not to think about it anymore," "I can so relate to feeling overwhelmed by things in my life that I'm less than satisfied with. We all go through it so know that you aren't alone. Completely loving yourself is a journey, I think. It takes time and practice to stop comparing ourselves to others and fully embrace ourselves as we are right now. I'm so glad that you posted this video. It was so touching and honest - and I think you're beautiful. I hope that you can come to see yourself as we subscribers do :o)."

While the establishment of PL had feminist roots and its advocacy of self-love echoes feminist thinking, the implementation of its messages expresses postfeminist values. Significantly, even though the subjects receive feedback from subscribers about their videos, they very rarely post anything back to facilitate a conversation. In presenting
their individual struggles to the community in this way, PL vloggers appear to advocate for self-knowledge or consciousness-raising via members' identification with their narratives (as in the above case with Crystal). Interestingly, however, because the viewers' feedback does not require a response, the process may work to heighten fatties' narcissistic preoccupation with themselves. For instance, Gretchen's unhappiness about her fat body seems to resolve itself (for the moment) by talking about self-love:

"Sometimes, I'm strong, and feel like love is mine to have and cannot be taken from my eyes...And sometimes, I turn away from myself in the mirror, and hate the unseen....Today, I choose acceptance. Today, I choose to break through and let love love me back, without judgment, without size, or shape or shame or weight or pain. Today, I choose myself. Have a great day, love yourself."

Gretchen's focus on individual empowerment emerges from her conflicted narrative about the fat female body and her emotional state as works in process. Gretchen does not need the feedback of the community to feel better, even though its members may need her vlogs to stimulate their own self-realization. For example: "Today I have been having a down day and was scrolling through my favorites and decided to rewatch this video. I am so glad I did. Thank you Gretchen because your poem brought me back to the place in my soul where I truly love me for me!" and "damnit gretchen! that made me cry. so beautiful! and because it touched me dearly, tomorrow, i will have a different outlook on myself, if just for a bit."

This focus on individualism is also seen in fatties' communications about the "good fat fight," a phrase that is used often by the vloggers in relation to their discomfort in airplane seats and struggles with depression (particularly how their difficulties
correspond with feeling badly about their bodies). The "good fat fight," then, is an
individual fight to feel better about themselves by having a better relationship with their
bodies. Much of their "fight," additionally, seems to be directed at "haters" who post
negative comments on their vlogs. The group's attention to this, while it helps protect PL
as a safe space for expression, does not guard the larger online FA movement against
"haters." If these fatties were activists in the spirit of the fat feminists, they could
instigate change by organizing a petition or approaching YouTube to regulate the content
of posts. They could also expand on the previous generations' infusion of social critique
about fatness.

Significantly, fatties do not work to educate users about FA. Vloggers could
provide users with strategies about how to discuss FA with their family members, friends,
and acquaintances, perhaps drawing on their own experiences. They could also offer
media criticism about representations of fat women, rather than expressing contentment
with any fat representation at all (for instance, as a fetish or in pornography). This
conversation need not focus only on depictions of fatness in popular culture; it could
interrogate research about the obesity epidemic and question its neoliberal discourse.
They could also generate interest in FA literature (which they touch on), tracing its roots
back to the 1960s and 1970s. Through these tactics, PL could aid individuals in their
interpretations of the fat body and effect social change regarding cultural meanings of
fatness.

WLS-ers are non-communicative to an even greater extent than fatties about their
political views (with the exception of Martha, who stumped for President Obama). This
dearth of political conversations suggests disinterest in feminist thought/action; and
indeed, none of the women in this group self-identified as a feminist or, more broadly, as a supporter of women's equal rights. However, their communication does reflect feminist concern about institutional/patriarchal attitudes toward women. Thus WLS-ers frequently describe their frustrations (especially about their post-op health concerns) with the often-gendered dynamics between themselves and their male doctors. This includes feelings of not being heard (but, rather, of being talked at) and of not having their health concerns taken seriously (but, instead, interpreted as overly emotional responses). Their awareness of such inequalities, though, is expressed only in their YouTube community, with no significant individual or collective call for change. Thus, even though YouTube offers a means for women to create media texts that contain political opinions, and even connect them to social change regarding feminism and beauty norms, members of the community simply reinforce cultural values in their media productions. Their online participation mirrors the entanglements faced by feminists who produced media texts in twentieth century consumer culture (as detailed in Chapter 2) by reinforcing -- and even demanding -- an embrace of hegemonic femininity by monitoring one's appearance and mobilizing consumerism and sexuality as practices of "empowerment."

Were they inclined to cultivate institutional or social change, WLS-ers could contact the governing institutional agents of weight loss surgery (such as the American Society for Bariatric Surgery or The National Association for Weight Loss Surgery), engage with doctors on physician websites, and generate conversations with WLS patients about these matters via interactive chats/forums on sites like obesityhelp.com. By focusing narrowly on their own bodies, however, they fail to advocate for changes that would help all women take better care of their bodies. This further suggests that self-love
motivates individual (but not collective or political) achievements for WLS-ers, who shape their community around their shared experiences of anticipating, struggling with, and triumphing through surgery that produces a slender, normative body; uncritically accepting institutional (medical) discourse about WLS; and enjoying consumerism and sexual self-display.

Additionally, there is a noticeable gap in WLS-ers' conversations that, if filled, could help effect change in institutional discourses about weight loss surgery. First, while they recognize that their post-op body does not offer them the quality of life they had anticipated due to the required disciplinary practices and physical ailments/surgical complications, they neither question nor even address why they were not prepared for these challenges. For instance, was their doctors' communication pre-surgery lacking in this regard, or was the information about the potential risks of surgery minimized in the promotion of the surgery's health benefits? It is likely that since such queries do not appear at the forefront of WLS-ers' discussions, pre-op viewers of their vlogs who want to be educated about the surgery will be similarly uninformed or dismiss its potential dangers (such as post-op complications leading to more surgeries or even death).

Further, WLS-ers do not talk about institutional issues that affect bariatric surgery patients, such as inequalities in health insurance coverage. As noted earlier, coverage is different depending on the individual's socioeconomic status and occupation. And, while some U.S. states require large corporations to cover morbid obesity treatment in their group health plans, smaller companies and private insurers may not provide any coverage. In fact, only "half of large employer health plans cover bariatric surgery, while small employers rarely cover it at all" (Alderman 2010), and co-payments can be $5,000
or more. Insurance coverage also varies by procedure; for instance, gastric bypass tends to be covered more than the lap band, limiting a patient’s choice of procedure. It is a challenge for individuals to obtain approval for WLS; 25 percent of WLS candidates are denied insurance coverage for surgery an average of three times before approval (Staff of Insure.com 2010). Several WLS-ers mention this experience in their vlogs, but they did not convert their struggles into a proactive dialogue about how to change the situation.

Their approach is the same regarding bariatric plastic surgery, which costs tens of thousands of dollars, and the majority of "insurers don’t cover surgery to remove sagging and excess skin after weight loss, unless it is considered medically necessary — if the skin is causing rashes, for instance, or infections" (Alderman 2010). The YouTube weight loss surgery community thus misses opportunities for online activism (e.g., developing and circulating petitions) within and beyond its own community.

Finally, the intersections of race and motherhood are also not addressed in WLS-er vlogs. Although the WLS-ers in this study are African American, Latina, and Caucasian, they do not articulate the meanings or experiences of WLS in relation to their raced subject positioning. In this way, the complexities of their identity politics are not acknowledged in this space. Another intersecting identity that is minimized is motherhood. Instead of sharing concerns about their post-op mothering practices (particularly in relation to food/exercise) and relationships with their children (e.g., how these might be positively or negatively affected), WLS-ers' discussion tends to revolve around the challenges that their weight poses in conceiving and bearing children or in taking off pregnancy weight. The YouTube weight loss community thus rarely functions as a space for WLS-ers to discuss their excitement and their struggles with pending or
actual motherhood, thus losing an invaluable social networking opportunity to promote a meaningful dialogue that is specific to these mothers.

By contrast with the above two groups, the wannarexics demonstrate a complete lack of social awareness, let alone activism. They do not discuss social, political, or economic issues regarding gender, race, class, sexuality, or other related identity politics. Nor do they raise personal or community awareness about the problematics of striving to achieve the dominant ideology of female beauty. Furthermore, the nature of the wannarexics' social support does not lend itself to any interpretation regarding how they might address feminist issues. For instance, wannarexics do not "look at models and movie stars and ask, Who picked this thin, passive type as our standard of beauty?"
(Pipher 1994, 178). Rather, wannarexics talk about their choice to self-discipline their bodies in terms of postfeminist values of personal responsibility, individual empowerment, sexuality, and consumerism.

Wannarexics create intimacy by revealing their current weight goals. They are oftentimes embarrassed about sharing this because of the number on the scale, even though they receive support from the community. For instance, when ed_surreal shared her current weight of 231 pounds and her plan to lose weight by eating 385 calories a day, feedback by community members cheered her on: "you'll get there your determination is inspiring." Sharing their recommendations for how to lose weight as well as their experiences while losing weight also connects members of the community. For instance, littlemisspoo wrote about her aim to eat 750 calories per day but "its only 7pm and i still have to figure out how to skip dinner with family. UGH. I am hungry, my stomach hurts and its rumbling and grumbling but im not going to eat because i dont need
to (so eff you stomach!)." Feedback to this post by community members related to her situation and supported littlemisspoo's goals: "Good luck! I am sure you can do it!...A word of caution, though...I liquid fasted a couple of weeks ago for five days, but ended up fainting in the supermarket, so kind of HAD to give up... it is not only dangerous to fall around all over the place, but it is really embarrassing."

As illustrated above, women across the groups in this study engage in the practice of postfeminist self-branding. They replicate consumer concepts and practices by packaging their aesthetic values as personal brands that communicate postfeminist themes. These subjects work to love their bodies -- and therefore, themselves -- through assembling in communities that self-identify using labels--"fatties," "anas," "WLS-ers"—that reflect varied approaches to hegemonic beauty. Just as the beauty values that are attached to celebrity images work to promote their brands in consumer culture (e.g., Moss as "rexy"), the users' self-brands promote values to their online viewers. In this sense, many of the frequent bloggers and vloggers cultivate a kind of micro-celebrity via their online self-presentation.

Of all the subjects in the three groups studied here, Meghan, who originated PL, stands out as having the most interest in micro-celebrity. She has had an active social media presence, maintaining two other YouTube channels devoted to her musical aspirations, before and during PL. She writes and performs her own songs and also covers popular songs. During PL's run, she appeared on The Ellen DeGeneres Show after her mashup of Britney Spears and Bruno Mars songs went viral; at the taping, she was introduced to plus size singer Adele (Meghan posted the video of their meeting on her channel). Meghan did not mention PL on Ellen, which she mentions in a vlog as an
oversight, blaming it on nerves. As a crusader for FA, utilizing that highly visible
television platform could have spread PL's message as well as that of the FA movement.
Her “oversight” suggest that she considered Ellen an opportunity to advance her singing
career, not PL or FA.

As demonstrated throughout this analysis, Meghan -- as creator and leader --
holds significant power over the PL site. The tension between individualism and
 collaboration in the meanings and practices of self-love on the site apparently came to a
head in July 2012, when it was terminated. Research did not yield a specific reason from
any of the vloggers as to why PL was shutting down; the last videos present the vloggers
as emotional (crying or holding back tears) and stressing that they wish that the channel
would continue. The vloggers and users declared that their communications were
therapeutic, aided them along their paths of self-discovery, and afforded them a space for
meaningful self-expression. As one user states, "Gosh I will miss this channel. I will miss
the inspiration, the laughs, and the honesty_ of all of the girls on this channel. <3 Thanks
for helping me_ understand that fat equals fat and nothing else."

In her final vlog, though, Meghan talks about the future -- she has lost weight
(over 70 pounds; see Fig. 29 for a recent Twitter photograph), is engaged (see Fig. 30 for
an Instagram photograph of herself apparently with her fiancé), is moving to Los
Angeles, and her singing career is gaining momentum. Her lack of sadness is notable
compared with the affect of the other vloggers, especially given that PL was her idea and
she was its leader: she selected the vloggers, devised the weekly conversation topics, and
began each week by vlogging on Monday. Importantly, she organized and prompted the
vloggers' conversations, which motivated users' responses as well as their attachment to
PL. Taken together, Meghan's narrative indicates that a tension developed between her individual and the collective interests and needs of the PL community and suggests that she seeks a separation from PL and from a fatty identity. Meghan, though, could have handed over the administrative role to another member to continue PL, or the fatties could have reorganized on another channel. The occurrence of neither event indicates Meghan's effective affective labor as a leader and how it circulated as part of the community's hierarchical dynamics.

YouTube afforded Meghan a space to cultivate an audience based on her musical talents as well as entry into mainstream popular culture. As a self-described "self-promoter," Meghan cross-promoted PL with her music channels. In this way, she utilized social media to cultivate her own celebrity. YouTube is a known space for the discovery of musicians, such as pop star Justin Bieber, and PL provided a platform to support this development by distinguishing her brand as a musician. Much like the Dove corporation's Campaign for Real Beauty and media mogul Tyra Banks promoting their brands on platforms of self-esteem (see Chapter 3), Meghan (consciously or not) advanced a similar message by promoting herself via self-love. Her decision to break from PL suggests that a fatty can choose when and how she wants to use that identity, indicating a postfeminist strategy that benefits the individual. Likewise, Meghan's ostensible role as a crusader for FA and the nature of PL's activism highlight the site as a postfeminist effort through its juxtaposition of feminist and anti-feminist ideas. Meghan is aware of her desires for individual cultural and financial power, acknowledging that she would "Love to work with companies or brands....I'm just saying, I'd rather see me in a Cover Girl commercial than some of these bitches in the game...Why be scared of being called a sellout?" Her
choice to promote contradictory messages about the fat female body, despite the potential of being seen as a "sellout" by the FA movement, suggests that, conscious or not, her approach to PL was part of a strategy for micro-celebrity. In this vein, the meanings and practices of self-love that Meghan encouraged in her community may have been an opportunity for cultivating her own status. This analysis underlines a narcissistic approach to PL by Meghan that exploited others’ emotions and labor for her advantage.

By contrast, while not apparently interested in micro-celebrity, the WLS-ers gained the most attention from the public. Kelly, for instance, received almost 900,000 views on one of her videos, titled "Before and After Weight Loss Photos at 3 Months." She became a YouTube partner, which provides her with both financial and cultural power. The YouTube Partner Program pays vloggers who have “cultivated a large following” (Noll 2010) based on the advertising revenue for their vlogs (which results in individuals making $1,000 to upwards of $100,000 per month).

However, even as a non-YouTube partner, Katie averages 40,000 views per video, demonstrating that the WLS-er content is more popular than that of PL, whose most-ever viewed video resulted in 32,000 hits. It is possible that it is the WLS-ers' "before" and "after" visual transformations, which mirror the popular makeover paradigm, that resonate with the public. WLS-ers are "real people" who may provide inspiration about weight loss through the depictions of their journeys. At the same time, they signal the values of hypertransformation and disciplining of the body that are especially evident in the genre of reality television; these themes are presented in shows that focus on weight loss as well as those that support the pursuit of hegemonic femininity, such as America's Next Top Model (see Chapter 3).
The wannarexics seem to be the least interested in becoming visible to individuals outside of their community, although they wax enthusiastic about celebrities in popular culture. Wannarexics view them as a source of inspiration (thinspiration) and express admiration for celebrities who have self-identified as anorexic, such as child actress turned fashion designer Mary Kate Olsen. fishgirl415, for instance, notes that she takes pleasure in music that discusses Olsen's anorexia: "I found a new favorite song today...The chorus goes:...Wants to look like a star/But she takes it too far/She's never good enough/Wants to be Mary Kate/Perfect weight, 88." The interest by wannarexics in celebrity culture is especially strong, consistent with the view of wannarexia as a recent phenomena that "is likely caused by a combination of cultural and media influences" (Bauman 2007). However, unlike celebrities who invite public engagement with their images, wannarexics remain insular and post very few photos of themselves. Thus, the likelihood that they will attain micro-celebrity in the broader online space or celebrity status offline seems small.

This analysis of postfeminist self-branding has indicated that, across the groups, women align with neoliberal narratives of femininity and participate in consumer culture in the name of choice and empowerment. Their self-love appears to stem from self-hate, and does not seem to include the self-acceptance that many seek. Rather, all subjects remain defined by the external; that is, by the size of and social meanings ascribed to the body. They view themselves by what they are not (thin) instead of by who they are (complex individuals who are more than their bodies), and they labor to change their bodies and their emotions about their bodies. By focusing on loving themselves around the body they want, meanings and practices of self-love seem to be intertwined with a
fantasy of what a woman can be if she achieves the new body that she desires. This focus on a utopian future diminishes her reality about the emotional and physical experiences of living in her current body, which means enacting varying degrees of self-discipline on it and coexisting with an ongoing inner critique about dissatisfaction with her appearance.

Affect and Beauty

The affect of my subjects regarding their felt experience of beauty has changed over time, which is often understood by them in terms of the past, the present, and the future. Following Coleman and Figueroa's work (as described in Chapter 1), I consider the ways in which the women in this study communicate hope about their bodies and beauty, where hope is "an embodied affect; that is, hope is the feeling that inclines towards the beautiful (where the content of what is beautiful might not yet be clear) and that provides a sense of being alive" (2010, 361). Alongside this, I also examine self-love as an affective communication that reveals meanings about the subjects’ experiences of living in their non-hegemonic bodies and informs how they "incline toward the beautiful" body.

_Inclination Toward Hope and Self-Love_

In the data, a relationship between beauty, hope, and self-hatred via the body emerged for fatties in the past and present. They communicate a sense of unhappiness, and even regret, about how they criticize/d their bodies. Since the fatties are vloggers (rather than bloggers), it is interesting that these feelings were evidenced through their practice of writing open letters to their bodies, wherein they "speak" to their bodies. Gretchen, for instance, expresses:

Dear Body,
Sometimes it's hard to step outside and really see you. I'm sorry for the times when I've called you names, diminished your beauty, and doubted your strength....your hips, thighs stomach, arms, and breasts, I constantly criticize them...for being too much...and I'm sorry...but they've also accepted pleasure on my behalf...I love you and thank you for loving me even when I did not love you back.

In this extract, Gretchen discusses her past as a time when she hated her body. By "step[ping] outside" her body in order to "see it," she is able to engage in self-reflection about her unhappiness they led her to denigrate it, ignoring its love and not responding to it with love. She attempts to move herself into a more positive experience in the present by apologizing to her body and thanking it for its unconditional love. At the same time as she describes her body as fragmented, made up of parts – hips, thighs, stomach, arms, and breasts – and criticizes each for "being too much," she understand that she has been wronged not by her body but by her own self-criticism. Indeed, she recognizes that her body, in the past, has "accepted pleasure on my [her] behalf." Seeking to making amends with her body, Gretchen seems hopeful that she can have a more positive relationship with it in the future (even though she does not plan on changing it). Gretchen is hopeful that she can experience her body and her feelings about her body in a unified way.

Crystal, also a fatty who expresses her feelings in an open letter, directs her frustration at her stomach in the present time. She talks to her body in a blaming way, as if she is speaking to a person who can respond to her, telling it:

You make me hate my existence. You make me feel inadequate and like I will never ever be the person that I hope to be. I can tell that you feel the hatred and I apologize.

Like Gretchen, she addresses a body that is fragmented into parts. First she accuses, revealing that her feelings about her body have translated into a negative experience of her whole "existence." The present seems hopeless in that she feels accused herself –
"You make me feel inadequate." However, in a quick turn-around, Crystal reveals a

glimmer of something positive, an awareness that is not yet fully conscious, of "the

person that I hope to be." She is able to empathize with her body and imagine how it feels

her hatred, for which she apologizes. Unlike Gretchen, who draws on the past, Crystal's

apology reveals hope to exist in the future as an inclination to be a better person towards

her body.

Meghan also writes to her body about how she will love it in the future. While she
does not reference her relationship with her body in other time periods, the affective tone
suggests that she has not felt love toward it in the past nor the present:

I will love my body, love my heart, love my mind. Because without you, I

wouldn't know what it is to feel terrified, to feel loved, to feel invincible,
to feel broken...so here is my vow [to my body]: I will never let anyone

hurt you, disrespect you, tell you that you are just something to overcome,
in sickness and health...we're going to protect each other because we came

in together, we're leaving together and no sticks or stones or words can

make that less real.

Meghan's vision carries a strong sense of embodied affect, in that she understands

that she lives in this world only because of her body. And so she makes a "vow" to it, like

someone entering into a marriage, promising to be its partner "in sickness and health,"
to"protect each other" and to always be together.

While the act of "speaking" to her body suggests that her body is external to her,

Meghan indicates a hope that her body will become a positive space in which to live out

her life, until, as the marriage text goes, "death do us part." She recognizes that she has

felt negative emotions (terror, brokenness) as part of her experience of embodiment, but

that does not weigh her down. Rather, she focuses on loving all facets of herself, both

affective and cognitive (her "heart" and "mind"). Meghan feels that this unity is "real,"
even if there will be adversity: "sticks," "stones," and "words" will not take that away from her.

Like the fatties, the WLS-ers experience beauty in the past, present, and future, but less in the future and more in the present, which also refers to the past. Rather than focusing of the fragmentation of the body, they talk about experiencing a different relation with the self due to their physical transformation. Also, as vloggers rather than bloggers, they vocalize their feelings to other community members.

Describing her immense weight loss in a relatively short period of time, Stephanie feels at a loss to reconcile her image from the past with her image in the present. Interestingly, this lack of reconciliation emerged when she faced the reflection of her transformed body in the mirror, as she narrates in her vlog:

Looking in the mirror...coming from 260 to 127 pounds in 2 years. Looking in the mirror, trying on a size small and some extra small? I literally had to say yes, that's you, Stephanie, that's you.

Stephanie’s sense of astonishment suggests that a complex network of feelings have not yet emerged, although she clearly communicates a strong sense of surprise and the feeling she had to convince herself that she is the same person as before. Stephanie continues her conversation with her mirror image, insisting that she really is no different:

You are no longer that 260 pound outer appearance person. You are still the same person on the inside. Except now you have to understand who you are...learn what will make you feel happy.

She conveys the sense of trying to convince herself that her thinner image will ultimately make her a happy person since her post-op self has the potential to experience happiness in ways that her fat self did not. Nonetheless, Stephanie’s view -- that feeling happy is associated with a thin body -- was also emphasized in her introductory vlog to
the YouTube WLS community: "I want to see [in the future] that I look totally different. I look so much better. I am happy." Stephanie seems hopeful that she is on the path to happiness due to her realization of a thin body. However, it is not something she feels in the present since she is still anchored in how she looks and what she understands about the meaning of her physical transformation.

Like Stephanie, Martha associates being a different person with having a new body. While Stephanie speaks in broad strokes about her future happiness, Martha is unequivocal that she is not the same and explicitly claims that the fact that she likes her current self will eventually grow into a feeling of self-love:

I'm so absolutely not the same person that I was. I was just self-loathing, self-deprecating... I loved desperately and I fought and I was very combative and I just genuinely did not like the person that I was. And now I am starting to like myself, I can't even say that I love myself, but I'm starting to like myself and feel...like I deserve more.

Martha's physical transformation resulted in an unambiguously positive feeling of separation from her past self and a promisingly positive feeling about the self she was and was becoming. Transforming her body resulted in transforming her feelings about herself as a person. In the past she was "self-loathing," in the present she is "starting to like" herself, and along with that, to feel "like I deserve more," which suggests a future relation. Increasingly valuing her new body and liking herself more suggests that she is on a path to self-love.

Kristen describes a different feeling of the self in relation to the body. In her case, the thinner self feels anxiety and fear, whereas the fat self fears loss of the ability to blame the body for its flaws. In her video, "I AM Afraid to Lose!," which was recorded after her surgery, she explains that, unlike Martha, she fears that a transformed body will
not result in the transformation of her feelings from negative to positive, and that she will not find happiness:

What if I attain my goal, and I'm still not happy? Then what? Then do I find another flaw in myself? Do I decide well, I lost all this weight, but I've got all this hanging skin now, so I need to focus all my energy on that, be obsessed with that till I can get rid of it?...My weight has always been the one thing I feel like has held me back my entire life. It's the one thing that I can blame everything on. If I don't do well at something, I can blame it on the fact that I'm fat...My fear isn't physically losing the weight and being a thin person...[it's] not having an excuse.

Kristen brings her past into the present to bear, with anxiety, on her future. That is, because her "fat" body was flawed, she was able to blame it for her general unhappiness with life. Now, instead of seeing the future as full of potential, she is concerned that she will continue to find flaws with her body. By being aware that she may remain unhappy with her body, Kristen projects a continuation of conflict with her body and herself. Responding to Kristen's fear, Kelly affirms her anxieties by using highly affective language, describing how she did not like her appearance in the wedding dresses she tried on after losing 100+ pounds due to the excess skin: "It's heartbreaking to not have a body that represents what you do on the inside and all the work that you put in on the outside." Both Kristen and Kelly link their happiness with realization of a goal: for Kristen, an experience of embodiment minus self-evaluation, and for Kelly, a transformed body that meets her standards of beauty. For WLS-ers, it appears that as much as the future can signal hope, it can also signal despair.

Wannarexics stand alone in their focus on the relationship between themselves and their bodies in the present and the future, without reference to the past. Their experience also is different in that they do not focus on fragmentation of the body or a feeling that different selves inhabit different bodies that need to be unified. Rather, the
wannarexics experience their bodies as an object for their labor and express their feelings in relation to how well they are able to perform that labor in order to achieve what seems to be a dream-like, idealized self/body in the future.

The present for wannarexics is a time to work on their bodies so that they can feel positively about themselves in the future. They feel that they are moving towards this moment in time by adhering to their diet and exercise plans. run4skinny relates, "I have been going several days without eating and loving it," and, similarly, ajonadiet expresses, "It's the end of day 4 of Ana Boot Camp and I feel awesome. Down 5 pounds as of this morning...doing great and hope you ladies are too <3." The subjects are positive about themselves because they are able to have the willpower that they desire in order to achieve the bodies that they want. Conversely, when they waver from this rigor, negativity overwhelms them, as per misa_mc: "It is getting really frustrating, and I am starting to lose my determination and motivation to get this weight off. Just feel like all this effort is turning into a lost cause." If they feel that they cannot stick to their diet and exercise regimes, wannarexics stay stuck in the present and show little hope toward the future.

While the present involves work, wannarexics envision the future as almost a dream-like state in which the struggle with their bodies, personal relationships, and professional opportunities does not exist. Wannarexics may never meet this state, but instead end up dying in the process, reaching peace only with death. If they reach their aspiration to be anorexic, they will have embraced an eating disorder that has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness (Maine and Kelly). littlemisspoo sets up affective pairs so that what she feels she is not in the present is what she will be in the future: "i'm
not happy, but i will be, i'm not pretty but i will be, i'm not successful but i will be...i will be...i will be." Her future self experiences happiness and success by feeling pretty. The relationship between the present and future self is unclear, and may be disconnected, but she senses that the dualism means something that is resoundingly positive. Repetition of the phrase "i will be" repeats the rhythm of a mantra or affirmation, expressing her commitment to a future where her hope is fulfilled for her body and herself. The future is a time of perfect beauty and happiness, both closely linked with her "prett[iness]."

In this extract, ed_surreal discusses her future as a time not only of happiness but also of love, a time when she is more than a body yet also experiences good feelings because she has achieved her desired body:

I just want to be happy...
I just want to feel good...
I just want to look pretty...
I just want to be skinny....
I just want to feel loved...
these are all things that seem to be something of only a dream.

For ed_surreal, being "skinny" holds the promise of a better life. The future holds limitless potential, although what she is "happy" about, or what she "feel[s] good" about remains vague. It is possible that both relate to her body/beauty or that simply having a skinny body is all that is needed for her to achieve happiness. The sequence of her "want[s]" is telling: her desire to "look pretty" is linked with her body size, and her ability to be loved by others resides in her future achievement of a skinny body. Her "want[s]" feel hopeful until we arrive at her final statement: "These are all things that seem to be something of only a dream." ed_surreal's hope appears to fade away and the future begins to feel like an unsustainable image. Her vision of the future is based on achievement in the present so that if she does not attain her short term goals, then self-love may be
unattainable as well. For her, self-love is based on the possibility of being loved by other people as well as experiencing love for herself.

Across the groups, the subjects express an inclination towards hope regarding beauty and self-love. Importantly, beauty, hope, and self-love do not appear to be abstractions for them, but rather a living feeling whose meanings emerge out of their experiences of the non-hegemonic bodies with which they are constantly and actively engaged. The subjects merge a sense of happiness with that of being able to love themselves. Loving their bodies and, in turn, themselves is not necessarily explicit, but, rather, implied. Being happier is linked with being happier with/in their bodies. The subjects feel the lure of beauty, the lure of seeing their bodies in the future as they want them to be, and the lure of feeling how they want to feel in those bodies. They feel hopeful that they are on the path to negotiating, and minimizing, struggle with their bodies. For many, envisioning themselves on a path to the future appears to assuage their present experiences of conflict about their beauty and ability to love themselves.

Self-love, then, like hope, appears to be an embodied affect that inclines to the future. In this study, all subjects envisioned the future, but not all located self-love in the past or the present. In the future, by and large, women can anticipate a consistently positive experience of the self in which they are happy with their bodies and their state. They have possibilities available to them, and they are open to receiving them. They can be loved by others, and they can love themselves without conflict. Their lives do not revolve around struggles with embodiment and/or appearance. They are not stuck in the past or the present with negative experiences of and attitudes towards the body. The
future is a place for a fresh start, holding the potential that their bodies will complement the person they want to be.

**Self-Love, Hope, and Cruel Optimism**

Berlant's theory of cruel optimism aids in understanding subjects' feelings about beauty/the body in relation to self-love and hope. The WLS-ers, of the three groups studied, provide the most evidence that self-love, as an embodied affect, can prove to be a cruel optimism. Although the women in this group have transformed their bodies to varying degrees, many of them remain unhappy with their physical appearance and with themselves. Yet, they stay attached to self-love, believing that the transformation of their bodies will increase their feelings of self-love. Many WLS-ers stopped vlogging as frequently once they achieved some success in losing weight, but most then renewed their online participation around the 1.5-2 year post-op mark for "re-motivation" after gaining 15-30 pounds. They reported feeling a need for accountability by confessing their struggles to the community and noting that, contrary to what they expected, the farther away from surgery they got, the harder it was to keep weight off and to feel good about themselves.

Dani offers a case in point. Although she lost 50 pounds in 3 months, she struggled to continue to lose weight as time went on. She expresses hope that she will continue to lose weight and plans to view weight loss as "slow and steady." She also expresses that she eats more healthfully post-op than pre-op. After stating that she was "not going to set any goals, just going to let my body do what it does, because it's gotten me this far," Dani discontinued vlogging at 13 months post-op. While this decision could be unrelated to her weight loss, Dani’s frustration with her inability to meet her weight
loss goals is the likely culprit. As she said in an early video, the surgery was "part of my own self-exploration...I want to understand that I do love myself for who I am." Weight loss surgery, then, was not only a means to lose weight but also a way to connect with the experience of self-love.

In stark contrast to the weight loss struggles of Dani, Debbie became obsessive in her weight loss efforts post-op. She realized soon after the surgery that "you still have to be really disciplined...[and] commit yourself." She began by exercising 1-2 miles a day and following a strict diet of 600-800 calories daily because "I'm really determined to lose a lot of weight" even though her doctor recommended a calorie intake of 1200. She recognized that she was transferring her obsessive behavior from food to exercise, but stated that she was okay with doing that because the obsession is "healthy." Over the next few months, Debbie declared that she was now eating 400 calories a day. In 4 months, she lost 100 pounds. She then began a self-devised plan of at least 80 minutes of workout a day (prorated over 5 workouts a day) in order to burn at least 900 calories a day, while consuming only 400-500 calories each day. She also started fasting one day per week to accelerate her weight loss. At this point, Debbie stated, "so you guys may not think that's healthy or whatever," but she nonetheless confirmed that she was sticking to her plan for at least two weeks, as she is excited at "seeing all my bones." A few weeks later, her weight loss stalled, and she stated that she "may not be eating enough food" to lose weight; that is, she speculated that her body was in starvation mode. She added: "this scale rules my life everybody. Every day, I think about my weight, every day I think about what I'm putting in my mouth, what I'm eating, how much am I exercising, calories in, calories out, it's so overwhelming."
Although Debbie was "totally paranoid about my calories," she nonetheless increased them a bit to meet her weight loss goal. In one of her final videos, Debbie commented that she had been working out too much and eating too little; in fact, she stated, "I learned my lesson" because she shrunk her pouch too much. She now exercises three times a day instead of five, walking a mile each time. She also eats a minimum of 600 calories a day. Debbie lost almost 200 pounds in 9 months. Her video at 2 years post-op shows that she has kept the weight off, but she acknowledges that her weight still "controls me," albeit differently post-op than pre-op.

Importantly, many of the WLS-ers have not worked through the psychological issues that caused them to overeat originally, and several indicate that they have transferred their addiction from food to something else. As mentioned above, Debbie became addicted to losing weight. Jen, in one of the last videos that she posted, stated that she has had a "transfer addiction" for the past year, which she did not discuss even as she continued to make videos. She remains vague about the specific nature of the addiction but, in the context of other stories that she relates about herself and her drug-addicted boyfriend, her statement that she "picked up a worse habit than eating" suggests that her new addiction is drugs. Jen also remained unhappy with her body, commenting that she gained 30 lbs in rehab and is looking for a "diet plan that works." She really wants "a boob job" to be a "nice full C" cup, and wants to have plastic surgery to remove excess skin, but it will cost her $12,000, which she cannot afford. She then declares, "I don't think we'll [WLS-ers] ever be happy with ourselves," to which no one responded. Additionally, Nicole, who stated that she is "so much happier" with herself and her body post-op, developed post-op issues with OCD, alcohol, and anxiety. In addition, she got
divorced because she said that her husband was unsupportive about her weight loss and disliked the attention she got from other men. Thus, despite transforming their bodies, WLS-ers experience continued despair about their appearance and themselves. This again indicates that while striving for self-love and the beautiful body, hope can be both "promising and depressing," but it will certainly be the latter if self-love is attached to something that does not allow them to flourish, an attachment of cruel optimism.

The members of the fat acceptance group, unlike the WLS-ers, devote themselves to emotional transformation alone and through this, they hope to accept their bodies and love themselves. Like the WLS-ers, however, much of their communication centers on the fact that the struggle is constantly unrewarding. For instance, Crystal that even though she feels better about her body, she still does not feel good about herself as a person: "I feel, like, a lot of the negativity I have on myself and, like, self-hatred comes from, like, who I am. I don't feel intelligent and so I feel dumb. I've, you know, embraced who I am, I've embraced my body, I can love it and I'm happy, but what I'm not happy with is my mind." So, she decided to enroll in college to "develop my mind so I'm not so dumb. I feel like that's really holding myself back from who I am as a person and I've ignored it for a really long time...I want to do what I feel that I'm meant to do in this life," which is to help "Sudanese people." This inclination to the future presupposes that Crystal will continue to love her body and then be able to be "who I am as a person" rather than "holding myself back." Nonetheless, Crystal continues to express discontent with her body and to discuss its parts, or fragments. For example, her favorite physical feature is her décolletage. However, her effort to highlight this area by putting tattoos on it left her
feeling that it was not as appealing: "I thought I would add some pretty ink to you [décolletage] but that made things so much more awkward."

Throughout PL, Crystal’s relationship with her body seems to elude being positive in any way other than in her inclination to be who she is in the future now that she can love her body. Crystal is not alone in this negative orientation. Alexis' communications about her body suggest that fatties continued to feel negatively about their bodies despite their participation in PL. Even though Alexis discusses the history of the fat acceptance movement and presents her participation in PL as part of her effort to accept her body/beauty, she states, "It's kind of hard to find some good things about my body amongst all the bullshit." She is concerned about her cellulite, and claims that her favorite physical feature is her "milk chocolatey brown" skin. Because she has never had acne, she tells her body, her skin has "got[ten] me a lot of compliments at how soft you are." Women's participation in PL does not prevent them from continuing to be self-conscious about or take pleasure in their fat bodies. However, liking a body part (décolletage, skin) does not necessarily lead to self-love for the fat body or the person in it.

Meghan, who has been shown in this study to be the strongest advocate of positive emotional expression (especially self-love), still sees her body as "flawed" and is still "self-conscious" about it. She also positions self-love as a goal, embedded in hope, as a proactive response to beauty texts disseminated by consumer culture:

Everyone talks about being comfortable in your own skin, loving yourself, because that's the goal, right? The one that everyone struggles to meet. Being told what beauty is by those who wait on this month's [magazine] issue to tell them what beauty can be...I've always thought that being comfortable in your own skin, loving yourself, is being comfortable enough to be scared to not have all the answers, to jump and not know
where you're going to land. Loving yourself enough to get back up, to not live for that magazine or that boy who wants the prom queen. But to live just to feel this world the short time that you're in it. To leave your mark on a world that inevitably leaves it mark on you.

Meghan does not recognize self-love as a "goal" located in media texts about beauty, which thus creates a tension between an individual's understanding of herself and the larger culture. Instead, she advocates self-love as a value for PL and, arguably, as the center of her personal brand and her aspiration to micro-celebrity. Moreover, Meghan attaches herself to this goal, and her leadership on PL similarly works to attach other women to it. Her role in highlighting self-love, in this sense, is similar to institutional messages promoting self-love as part of an ideology of beauty. In her effort to "love herself," she articulates hope for herself, and for other women, that, ultimately, attaches them even more firmly to the values of consumer culture. Meghan thus perpetuates cruel optimism by sanctioning attachment to self-love for the fat body, which does not appear to lead the women in her community to flourish.

Wannarexics demonstrate the most proactive response to a continued failure at weight loss: they simply do not accept it and they carry on, with renewed vigor, trying new methods to reach their goal. Yet, during this never-ending process of labor on their bodies, at no point do they claim feelings of satisfaction. They do not meet their weight goals, and, therefore, they remain perpetually unhappy with their body size, their overall appearance, and themselves. Significantly, they continue to feel that they have failed. As ajonadiet explains, "Soo...I failed again. how i stay so determined [to lose weight] i have no idea." In a later post titled "I need to do this!," her hope continues: "I need to stop failing. I need to be skinny....I can do this, I can do this, I can do this, I can do this." When she finds a new diet -- the ABC Diet, aka Ana Boot Camp Diet -- she is again
hopeful that she will lose weight. However, her subsequent binge undoes her previous labor, and she gains 1.5 pounds. She comes up with a plan to do a water fast the next day, and then get back on track with the ABC diet, calling her binge a "shitty road block." To discontinue labor is to end her hope that she can have the body that she wants, and, subsequently, the positive feeling about herself that will accompany the achievement of this goal. In this group, self-love remains a distant and dangling carrot that guides their constant work, signifying the opposite of the failure they continually experience. That is, they incline, in the future, to self-love. As ed_surreal states, "I just want to be happy.../I just want to feel good."

Some wannarexics (as in ajonadiet's case) present their failures as their own doing. Others, though, blame friends and family members. As misa_mc relates, "my diet is just terrible...with the boyfriend coming over...he loves ordering these battered mushrooms and cheese balls <deep fried> and ofcourse [sic]...i say to myself...I WON"T [sic] EAT IT!!!!!!!...and then I give into the temptation....And then my bro buys these mini cookies...which are my favorite...I have already ate 4 this morning (110 cal for 2)."
misa_mc never obtains her ideal body, but stays attached to her desire to do so. However, her boyfriend's and family members' love for fatty and high calorie foods undermines her determination and is blamed for her failure to get what she really wants: a thin body...and love for herself.

This interplay of failure and hope, though not tied to self-love, manifests across the wannarexics' communication. For instance, ed_surreal writes, "So today's intake was a bust. but...tomorrow WILL BE [a] great day. I AM going to change! My body will become pretty..." In a later post, though, she has failed yet again: "So late night I hopped
on my friends scale. Maybe the scale is broke, Idk [sic], it is an out of date one. but regardless. It pretty much said I've gained EVERYTHING back." The circularity in the wannarexics’ communication suggests how cruel their optimism can be. They experience small successes, such as short-term weight loss, only to fail again; or they feel, regardless of what they lose, that they still have a long way to go. They express no happiness in their bodies or themselves.

They do, however, remain part of the community, detailing their weight loss struggles, looking for new diet plans and diet/exercise tips. Sometimes, wannarexics leave the community out of frustration at their inability to lose weight, only to come back to it, generally within a few months. run4skinny stopped participating in ana_circle for two months, stating, "It's been a long time since I've been on here...I was eating, and not caring. Horrible. I gained so much weight...I am so mad at myself for not pushing myself harder...I'm so nervous. I know it's going to be another let down. Ugh. I just need motivation."

Despite their ongoing experiences of failure, the word "motivation" pops up frequently among wannarexics, as does the phrase "stay strong!" This language, suggesting support for attaining self-love in the future, prompts wannarexics to perform more labor by commanding feelings of optimism or power. Yet what they hope to gain by their labor -- an anorexic, emaciated body that is potentially fatal -- is, indeed, a cruel optimism.

As evidenced in the excerpts above, hope is certainly an important aspect of women's communication about their bodies/beauty, one that appears to signal a relationship with self-love. In many ways, however, their vlogs and blogs suggest that, in
regard beauty, self-love materializes as a cruel optimism. The subjects remain attached to it at all costs, perceiving it as a necessary corollary to loving their bodies, but it does not lead them to the "good life" that was promised if one achieved a feeling of beauty. Thus, even after undergoing surgery and engaging in rigorous labor on their bodies, the WLS-ers remain unhappy, even to the point of, in some cases, developing transfer addictions. The fatties continue not to accept their bodies – as evidenced in their fragmentation and criticism of them; and, if they do accept their bodies, they feel badly about themselves in other ways (in the case of Crystal, with her intellect). And, in one of the most serious contradictions, Meghan, who spearheaded PL, replicates the techniques and values of beauty in consumer culture to promote self-love in her own community. Finally, wannarexics never meet their weight goals or obtain their desired bodies, and although they demonstrate hope, it is only as the upside in their repetitive cycle of failure. They incline to self-love in the future, when their bodies are skinny and they have attained a potentially fatal beauty, which is indeed, a cruel optimism. For the women in this study, self-love carries within it the fantasy that they can resolve their struggle with beauty and their bodies and learn to love themselves. However, even after all their labor, as good neoliberal subjects and as women simply living in their bodies, these women continue to be denied the "good life" that their pursuit of beauty seemingly promised.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of this study. In it, I suggest the term *self-love subjectivity* to refer to a contemporary gendered subjectivity that links the history of entanglements between feminism and media culture, the values disseminated by cultural figures in postfeminist media culture, and contemporary women who participate in digital culture to discuss their own bodies and beauty. However, self-respect may be the true goal that users are struggling to achieve in order to navigate the cruel optimism of beauty and self-love in the current postfeminist, digital age. Given the limitations of any single study, there are several directions for future research that can further the goals of this project.

**Overview of Findings**

In this project, I have provided a contextual analysis of postfeminism and its subjects, ranging from industries to celebrities to brands to users. Following presentation of the theoretical framework and methodology for this study in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provided a cultural history that served as a backdrop for themes explored in Chapters 3 and 4; these chapters provided analyses that responded to my two sets of research questions.

Chapter 2 explored the politics of beauty within the beauty industry and the feminist relations to that industry in three sections. The first section outlined the role of the industry in disseminating meanings of hegemonic beauty that incite conformity and an aspiration to a specific appearance among female audiences. Consumer culture texts—advertisements, magazines, television shows—have promoted and disseminated hegemonic representations of beauty for over a century and encouraged women to
purchase goods and pursue “looks” as a means of social mobility and a way of adapting to modernity. Moreover, these texts identified female power with women as consumers, particularly of products related to their bodies and clothing. The slender body was privileged, while the fat body became associated with emotional and moral flaws. The next section focused on feminists' involvement in media constructions of beauty and in disseminating its relation to feminism in the twentieth century. Elaborating on key moments of their entanglements illustrates the many challenges feminists faced in their efforts to wield consumer culture and the beauty industry to advance women’s empowerment. Beginning with suffragists’ representations of the modern woman, I describe how they crafted their own images, working within the strategies of consumer culture to market their version of a feminist identity. The later attempt of feminists to portray a more progressive woman to the American public via the beauty industry also proved sticky. Despite what appear to be the best intentions, feminists contributed to the problematic of female beauty (especially as it was linked with the sexual objectification of women) through their work on advertisements in the early twentieth century (such as Resor and her team at J. Walter Thompson), to their production and editing of popular feminist magazines in the late twentieth century (Ms., Bitch, and Bust). The concurrent use of feminist discourse by advertising and media industries further devalued feminist politics in popular culture, as demands for empowerment were recast in terms of consumer ideologies. That is, women could access empowerment simply by purchasing products that were promoted, explicitly or subliminally, as contributing to their liberation. The chapter concluded by addressing the ways that meanings of loving the body/self and
self-esteem in popular media have become intertwined with those of feminism and beauty since the 1990s.

Chapter 3 responded to my first set of research questions: What are the current entanglements of feminism and media culture around beauty? And how is their configuration communicated to audiences via industries, celebrities, and brands? These entanglements are located within the context of postfeminist media culture. To reiterate, as described by Tasker and Negra, postfeminism is "a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated" (2007, 1). In postfeminism, women's freedom, choice and "empowerment" are linked to consumerism, and "women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (Gill and Scharff 2011, 7). In this light, this chapter considers how postfeminism is embodied by three prominent cultural figures (Kate Moss, Tyra Banks/America's Next Top Model or ANTM, and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty or CFRB) who communicate meanings of beauty in the postfeminist context, wherein "beautification discourses place strong stress on the achieved self" (Negra 2008, 119). All three advocate the pursuit of beauty as a constructive value that supports self-improvement, personal responsibility, self-surveillance, and self-governance and leads to social and economic mobility. They do so by employing postfeminist self-branding, a process that signals individuals' consumption of the codes and values of consumer culture that then play into their self-construction and the formation of a shared community identity. Postfeminist self-branders insist on
overcoming insecurity by achieving a newfound sense of self (Hearn 2008a) via transformation (Hearn 2008a) and self-promotion (Banet-Weiser 2012).

Chapter 3, then, shows the ways in which postfeminist self-branding has been communicated as a normalized process for women's negotiation of beauty in the early twenty-first century through analyses of three figures of postfeminist embodiment -- "rexy" (Moss), "fierce" (Banks/ANTM), and "real beauty" (CFRB). This work provides a foundation for the analysis in the subsequent chapter of female users' expressions about their bodies/beauty.

Specifically, Chapter 3 demonstrates the ways in which meanings of "empowerment" support neoliberal values for women's labor on and attitudes about their bodies. For example, fashion model and celebrity Kate Moss represents an icon of "postfeminist disorder," symbolizing "unhealthy femininity" (McRobbie 2008) in terms of beauty and sexuality. Moss' "rexy" body plays with notions of indulgence and discipline and the blurred interconnections between the two underlie her aesthetic and celebrity status. These "knotted" (à la Marc Quinn) postfeminist values of femininity - portrayed as a struggle between indulgence and discipline – are related to the production (through diet/drugs) and presentation (as sexuality) of the female body and identity. They both indicate and illustrate cultural conflicts that surround the pursuit and embodiment of femininity in our contemporary era. These representations of Moss serve as a model of "thinspiration" for many women, who enact her "feel-good" slogan, "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels."

Fashion model turned media mogul Tyra Banks, through her reality television program, ANTM, allows us to trace another postfeminist journey of "empowerment." She
advocates "fierce" - a mantra of transformation that requires immaterial/affective labor by women to improve their bodies and attitudes - as a way to overcome contestants' low self-esteem. Participation on ANTМ, a makeover show, is offered as an opportunity to become empowered through a process that will transform the women's identities and help them leave their difficulties behind. The messages conveyed through ANTМ facilitate the self-branding of Banks' contestants as "fierce" neoliberal citizens, which signals a move from being ordinary to extraordinary (supermodel-quality) people.

Finally, CFRB, targets media portrayals of beauty that lessen self-esteem in girls and women and positions Dove as an ally and problem-solver to aid women in feeling better about themselves in relation to these media messages. Significantly, CFRB involves feminists and girls' organizations in its production and positioning of "real beauty" at the nexus of contemporary meanings of beauty and feminism. Additionally, while CFRB denotatively associates "real beauty" with diversity and independence, its connotative signs stand in stark contrast to those values. The messages draw on key themes in feminist politics -- liberation and oppression -- to present "real beauty" as democratizing and thereby freeing women from the directives of the dominant ideology of beauty. In fact, though, branding oneself as "a real beauty" enlists conformity by demanding women's labor to become part of an "inventor[y] of branded selves" (Hearn 2008b, 211). Dove then profits "by packaging, branding them, and selling them back to themselves" (Hearn 2008b, 209). CFRB thus raises critical questions about meanings of feminist activism around beauty as well as about female power in relation to beauty. My analyses of both ANTМ and CFRB highlight adherence to and communication of "a postfeminist sensibility," as described by Gill - that is, "femininity is a bodily property;
the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; the articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas;...and an emphasis upon consumerism" (2007a, 255).

Chapter 4 responds to my second set of research questions: What meanings and experiences emerge from the participation of women in digital culture as they navigate consumer culture's intertwined meanings about female beauty and power? More specifically, what do their digital media practices and expression of values about female beauty/bodies suggest about the formation of contemporary subjectivity in postfeminist media culture in new ways? And, in what ways do women's affects (feelings) related to beauty complicate the meanings of this subjectivity? I looked at members in three online communities who grew up in postfeminist media culture (their age range was 18-33) and struggle with nonhegemonic bodies - fat acceptance (FA), wannarexics (women who want to "be anorexic"), and weight loss surgery patients - to understand how they have absorbed and recirculated postfeminist values around beauty and embodiment.

Members of each community viewed their bodies in relation to hegemonic beauty and each was organized around a label that signified its particular relationship with these values: "fatties" (fat acceptance); "ana/wannarexics" (anorexia/wannarexia); and "WLS-ers" (weight loss surgery patients). While all communities endorsed normative values of beauty, they engaged the cultural meanings and practices around beauty differently. The WLS-ers showed an absolute and total dedication to beauty/the body along culturally normative lines, reproducing the values of the makeover paradigm that is central to postfeminist media culture. Simply put, to transform the body is to be the good neoliberal
subject, and members of this group were very good neoliberal subjects. The fatties showed ambivalence regarding beauty/the body, suggesting that ambivalence is acceptable, especially if it affords the person an opportunity to accomplish other personal goals. Members of this group demonstrated support for the cultural values of micro-celebrity and postfeminist/neoliberal activism; to wit, they discussed "real beauty" (the beauty value in CFRB, which was supported by feminists) and Girls, Inc. (a Dove partner that works to build self-esteem in girls). Wannarexics' approach to beauty/the body suggested, on the other hand, that life is and will always remain an unsatisfying, perpetual cycle of unacceptable ambivalence and acceptable struggle in which dissatisfaction with their bodies and emotions about them will forever be center stage. The beauty values they endorsed support consumer culture as offering images and ideals to live by. Much to their detriment, these women keep fantasies of postfeminist empowerment and self-love alive.

The values of beauty promoted by these communities support the tenets of a "postfeminist sensibility" and all of their members engaged in postfeminist self-branding. Across the groups, transforming their emotions in relation to their physical attributes proved central to loving their bodies and themselves. Self-display was also important: the women promote their beauty values by presenting their bodies as sexualized and as objects to be clothed, reshaped, enhanced, etc, demonstrating that they fervently value consumerism. For the WLS-ers and wannarexics, in particular, loving their bodies additionally necessitates that they perform labor to alter them from fat to thin; the process incites communication about shared experiences around their anticipations, conflicts, and
triumphs regarding the production of a slender, normative body. Political/feminist activism is nebulous, at best, across the three groups.

Community members also communicated their desire to shift from insecurity to a new sense of self as they engaged in immaterial/affective labor in pursuit of emotional and/or physical transformation, which they validated through self-promotion of their specific beauty values. These groups illuminated the ways in which a neoliberal technology of the self now permeates everyday life and demonstrated the overlap of neoliberalism and postfeminism. As part of their expression of postfeminist values in relation to beauty/bodies, the women regularly communicated feelings and values/practices relating to self-esteem and narcissism.

In exploring self-love as an embodied affect, most of these women feel hope that, in the future, their experience of their bodies/beauty will be consistently positive, as will be their experience of the self. That is, they will feel happy with their bodies and in general, and will be able to love themselves and be loved by others without conflict. The future is a place for a fresh start, where they are the person they want to be. In most cases, however, self-love ultimately appears to be a cruel optimism. The subjects remain attached to self-love in relation to beauty at all costs, perceiving it as a necessary corollary to loving their bodies, although it does not lead them to the "good life" that was promised by their celebrity or media icons.

The varying degrees of labor that subjects perform on their bodies suggest the gap between the fantasy they strive to achieve and the reality of achieving it. WLS-ers show immense commitment to transforming their bodies, taking a no-holds-barred approach wherein they pursue surgery and even risk death to love their bodies and themselves.
They readily accept the probability that this choice will lead to enormous challenges, such as constant nausea, vomiting, malnutrition, dehydration, ulcers, gallbladder removal, etc. Central to their rationale for having surgery appears to be a desire to demonstrate to others that they are taking responsibility for their health, but the majority of their communication focuses on wanting to make their bodies thinner so as to be more socially acceptable. Because of their discomforting physical experiences, however, they are often deprived of realizing the anticipated pleasure of looking at and adoring their own bodies or enjoying it as an object that others gaze at approvingly. The wannarexics likewise take a no-holds-barred approach to changing their bodies and their lives, but they seem unable to maintain the necessary labor. Moreover, the state they are pursuing—anorexia—has a high mortality rate and rarely leads to a sense of happiness and fulfillment. Fatties show ambivalence about their labor. They uniformly support efforts to improve their emotions about their bodies, but have contradictory and conflicted approaches to laboring on their bodies. For example, Meghan, the founder of PL, ultimately chooses to lose weight and disassociate herself from the community. Meanwhile, others describe a desire to lose weight even as they try to accept their bodies as they are. More than the other two groups, they have some political, and perhaps feminist, interest and awareness, yet it is manifested primarily in support of "real beauty" and the development of individual micro-celebrity.

**Self-Love Subjectivity**

The theoretical framework and methodology for this study, involving postfeminist self-branding of beauty on the one hand and affective communication around beauty on the other, reveals tensions between everyday women's desires to live in bodies that they
feel are beautiful in order to love themselves and the constraints placed by cultural norms on this desire. This tension characterizes what I term self-love subjectivity; that is, the ways in which women in online communities take in cultural messages about beauty/bodies and form themselves as subjects through their feelings about and values and practices of love for the self. As illustrated in Chapter 4, these feelings, values and practices relate to self-esteem, narcissism, and hope. Self-love subjectivity, then characterizes women who transform themselves around a meta-narrative of self-love in media culture that associates values of beauty and the body with self-esteem, transformation, self-promotion, and narcissism. This postfeminist subjectivity underscores the interplay between these women and the values disseminated by iconic figures in postfeminist media culture. Self-love, as an embodied affect, also highlights how this contemporary gendered self signifies the struggles and hope regarding beauty that emerge from contemporary women's participation in digital culture.

Thus women in digital communities draw on meanings of beauty/bodies that are circulated in consumer culture and that insist a woman must love her body in order to love herself. The pursuit of self-love, then, is integral to the everyday experience of female users who struggle with living in their bodies. The conception of self-love deployed here fits easily within the growing scholarly field of "love studies" and of black feminist politics, which both consider love as a radical political project.

Self-Love and Consumer Culture

Self-love, as a meta-narrative in media culture, circulates both directly and indirectly. As has been noted earlier, the interchangeable use of "loving your body and "self-love" is embedded in the narratives of and about popular cultural figures and in
beauty texts themselves. The cultural forms analyzed in this project indicate that meanings and practices of love for the body are associated with self-esteem (ANTM, CFRB) and narcissism (Moss). The relation between self-love and self-esteem suggests that it is important for women to improve how they feel about themselves vis a vis feeling better about their bodies. The relation between self-love and narcissism can be seen as an extension of McRobbie's (2008) notion of "postfeminist disorder," where advocating unhealthy femininity via a mantra like "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels" is considered culturally acceptable even though it benefits mainly the celebrity who communicates it and encourages problematic behavior (eating disorders/drugs) in others who seek to replicate her hypersexual self-presentation.

Across the cultural figures examined here, the tactics of self-esteem and/or narcissism suggest that the labor women/users engage in on or about their bodies will resolve their emotional and physical struggle with their bodies/beauty. Moss' "rexy" value of beauty, for instance, signals social acceptability and indicates that others can feel positive about their bodies if they adopt her aesthetic. While Moss' labor to produce that body is invisible to the viewer, her image connotes that this desirable product was produced via unhealthy labor (e.g., drugs or an eating disorder) and suggests that narcissism is part of this beauty value. By contrast, the bodies in CFRB, promoting the value of "real beauty," denote women who feel healthy and have self-esteem and body acceptance. "Real beauty" stresses that women must improve their emotions about their bodies, not change their bodies, although it simultaneously endorses a consumerist approach to beauty and hypersexual self-display of the body in their visual representations. Banks/ANTM’s concept of "fierce" emphasizes that women labor both on
their bodies and on their emotions to improve their self-esteem and enable personal happiness and professional promise.

For all the cultural figures, the imperative for loving the body frames their values of beauty. Working to love one's body and oneself is beneficial for reaping personal and professional benefits. Importantly, these figures indicate that holding these values means having a sense of contentment with their bodies/beauty. They no longer struggle with how they feel and look, but are instead empowered. These values about beauty underline their postfeminist self-brands.

**Self-Love and Digital Culture**

Users in the three digital worlds analyzed here serve as cultural intermediaries and cultural producers. In these roles, the women communicate values of beauty that draw on the beauty industry's meanings in addition to their own in online spaces. Self-love subjectivity encapsulates how each community's philosophy of beauty -- fatties, wannarexics/ana, and WLS-ers -- and its members' formation of selves connect to the broader consumer culture represented by the contemporary cultural figures analyzed above.

There is a relationship between cultural figures and users in that the latter have absorbed the meanings and values of postfeminist media culture, as well as the consumer culture strategy of postfeminist self-branding, through the former. Moreover, the users draw on the cultural figures' meanings around self-esteem and narcissism as part of their own transformation and self-promotion of beauty values; these meanings intimate love for the body within the media environment's denotative "love your body" focus. The users have consumed and reconfigured these meanings, associating self-love with
feelings, values and practices that relate to self-esteem and transformation, narcissism and self-promotion, and hope and struggle.

Across the three online groups, all of the members worked to transform and promote their bodies and/or emotions about their bodies, and for all of them, beauty appeared to be enmeshed with self-love. A two-pronged approach - that is, self-love as part of women's cultural values/practices and as an embodied affect that inclines to beauty felt in different temporalities - illuminated how self-love relates to women's engagement around beauty.

It is important to note a significant difference between the postfeminist self-branding by prominent cultural figures and that of everyday users regarding their values of beauty. In the users, unlike the cultural figures, there is visible ongoing struggle with their bodies associated with the execution of their beauty values. To love their bodies and love themselves means a constant battle, and their labor to accomplish this is painfully visible. Even though they have engaged in work on their bodies and emotions about their bodies to transform themselves, to support norms of appearance and behavior regarding gender and sexuality, and to promote their community's values of beauty, their self-criticisms, blame of others, and cycles of gains and relapses seem endless. The users' struggles, moreover, suggest that improving themselves necessitates narcissistic tendencies (e.g., in their lack of engagement with subscribers who show support for them and lack of social awareness or activism that would help others) as part of the production of desirable bodies and feelings of self-loving.

The feelings around self-love as an embodied affect in relation to beauty suggest that women feel hopeful that they will resolve their struggles with their bodies, that one
day they will feel attractive and good about themselves. Yet, as they reveal these hopes throughout their vlog and blog journeys and as the future becomes the present, they never achieve that resolution. These feelings, then, seem only to obstruct them from seeing other possibilities that, in the end, might actually enable them to flourish. Self-love as a relation of cruel optimism in this sense is central to conflicted female subjectivity around beauty. While the cultural environment indicates that if only women will continue to work on themselves to love their bodies and themselves, they will attain it, the women in this study never seem to get there.

Self-Love Subjectivity: Neoliberal Subjectification and/or Political Project?

Love has emerged into prominence as a discussion in cultural studies (e.g., Michael Hardt, Lauren Berlant, Melissa Gregg) and has been a topic in black feminist politics especially since the 1970s (e.g., Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks). Black feminist work on love, such as that of hooks, who wrote a trilogy on love (these texts include All About Love: New Visions [2001a]; Salvation: Black People and Love [2001b]; and Communion: The Female Search for Love [2002]), considers love to be transformative and self-realizing. More recently, Jennifer Nash (2013) proposed love politics as a promising political project to move beyond intersectionality. Darnell Moore (Managing Editor of the popular website The Feminist Wire) and women's and gender studies scholar Monica J. Casper recently identified scholarship that is part of the "burgeoning field of love studies...[and can] be squarely placed within or contiguous with the interdisciplinary domain of affect studies" (Moore and Casper 2014). This includes work by Michael Hardt, who states that "Love makes central the role of affect within the political sphere" (Berlant and Hardt 2011), and Berlant, who calls love "a concept for the
possibility of the social" (Berlant and Hardt 2011). For their part, Moore and Casper advance a "template for a multimodal feminist, anti-racist, queer digital and material praxis guided by an ethics of care and love and ultimately empathic solidarity in the service of transformative justice," all of which can occur in digital culture. They write:

Love is a complex concept to practice and theorize. Love is antithetical to the desire to regulate bodies and the knowledge they produce. Theorizing love, therefore, is a practice that must perform the intervention that love signifies; it resists, if not razes, the limitations and boundaries that tend to willfully separate bodies of knowledge and peoples. That is, approaches to critically investigating love must be interdisciplinary and without boundaries…Furthermore, theorizing love is a risky task precisely because of its radical political potential. Love is an affective dimension often stripped of meaning; it can be de-radicalized and commodified to sustain global capitalism in our neoliberal age. To seriously consider love as a possible hermeneutic through which to view the world and its various human, animal, and geographic bodies is to participate in a type of feminist work of illuminating difference and, therefore, power differentials. After all, love might best be rendered an affective and effective feminine/feminist strategy which is likely why theories of love continue to circulate within the interdisciplinary fields of gender and women’s studies, queer theory, and the like. (Moore and Casper 2014)

Feminist scholars theorize self-love in association with love, as discussed in Chapter 1. In the present study, self-love suggests neoliberal subjectification, quite different from how love is conceptualized above. Hardt illuminates the role of philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who has been an influence on the field of affect studies. Hardt writes, that, for Spinoza, self-love, unlike love, is a "nonsense term:" "Spinoza defines love as the increase of our joy, that is, the increase of our power to act and think, with the recognition of an external cause. You can see why Spinoza says self-love is a nonsense term, since it involves no external cause. Love is thus necessarily collective and expansive in the sense that it increases our power and hence our joy" (Berlant and Hardt 2011). Yet, as this study suggests, self-love is part of the contemporary consumer culture narrative, especially regarding beauty. Moreover, as revealed here, it is an embodied
affect that relates to how women regulate their bodies through disciplinary practices and via the knowledge they produce about about self-love in relation beauty values that characterize their postfeminist self-brands.

Self-love, as interrogated in this study, affirms creating oneself around the values of postfeminist media culture and appears to leave aside resistance to or critique of the political context, especially regarding norms for women's beauty/bodies. For my online subjects, this is evident in such behaviors as users attending mainly to increasing their positive feelings through attention to work on themselves. They do not critique prominent or iconic cultural figures, in or outside of this study, although doing so as a collective has the potential to bring about positive social change regarding hegemonic beauty. This focus on individualism is also seen when members feel that they are moving closer to their weight loss goals; they would often leave the community and then return after gaining weight for renewed support. Perhaps the most powerful example of narcissism is evidenced in the case of Meghan, who founded the PL site: she closed it down to move on with her music career after having lost weight. And, across the groups, users erase rather than celebrate difference by striving to realize similar bodies and emotions about them in the name of postfeminist "empowerment."

Self-love, in the sense that conversations around it reference feminist notions of self-help and self-esteem, can be seen as part of a trajectory of feminist values that have been commodified and disseminated in popular culture. In her book *Women and Self-Help Culture: Reading Between the Lines*, sociologist Wendy Simonds declares that:

> In general, the ideology of self-help books, like the capitalist and patriarchal ideology that is dominant in our culture, denies connection and community-based action...Readers also do not approach these books clamoring for social change...readers feel it allows them to tap into a community of sorts; they 'feel
less alone' when they read...the self-help book does not prohibit new or radical transformations of problems; but currently, its extension of therapeutic and individualistic solutions provides only an illusory cure for what ails us, collectively, as a culture. (1992, 227).

Likewise, popular meanings of self-esteem can be seen as an "illusory cure for what ails us." Second wave feminist figurehead Gloria Steinem's muddy meanings of self-esteem, as discussed in Chapter 1, were attached to notions of individual responsibility. Importantly, Steinem's views on self-esteem were popularized to audiences during the growing neoliberalism of the 1990s. While certainly not the only advocate of self-esteem, Steinem’s cultural power means that she contributed significantly to cultural notions of self-esteem that engaged neoliberal values and linked those values to feminist ideologies. In her 1993 article "Revolutions Within: Self-Government and Self-Esteem," political scientist Barbara Cruikshank looks at themes of power and subjectivity by, in part, studying Steinem's role in the "self-esteem movement." In so doing, she identifies self-esteem within broader conceptions of democratic citizenship, calling it "a technology of citizenship and self-government for evaluating and acting upon our selves so that the police, the guards and the doctors do not have to" (Cruikshank 1993, 330). Likewise, in *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects*, Cruikshank explicitly links self-esteem to neoliberal governance, arguing that a cultural focus on self-esteem positions it as a form of self-governance; through this power dynamic, the self-esteem movement "'politicizes" (1999, 6) the self. As noted in Chapter 3, this focus on self-esteem as a value supported by feminists in consumer culture has been especially evident around The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty and its alliances with Susie Orbach, Naomi Wolf and Wolf’s non-profit organization, the Woodhull Institute. In addition to their endorsements, the Campaign
received praise from Steinem, who called it "a great step forward...[The Campaign] has great content and it's gone beyond advertising to speak to the way we view ourselves" (Community Notes 2007). The National Organization for Women also awarded the advertising team that created the Campaign with an Image of Women award. Self-esteem signifies the entanglements of feminists and media culture, providing a fertile ground for the circulation of the similarly neoliberal value of self-love.

The first part of the title of this project – "Love Our Bodies, Love Ourselves" -- plays off of the influential feminist work, Our Bodies, Ourselves, which helped launch feminist activism regarding the body. Notably, in 2012, the Library of Congress named it one of the "Books That Shaped America," describing it as a "groundbreaking publication...[that] explored ways for women to take charge of their own health issues and to work for political and cultural change that would ameliorate women’s lives" ("Books That Shaped America Exhibition" 2012). Sarah Banet-Weiser elaborates on the activist nature of the text, and the ways in which it was foundational for future feminist work about the body: "From the second-wave feminist insistence that the 'personal is the political' to Our Bodies, Ourselves (1973), a pathbreaking book on women's health and sexuality, to the early 1990s feminist punk underground movement Riot Grrrls, taking care of one's self, and 'owning' one's body was a specifically feminist issue, one that revolves around freeing women from patriarchal restraint” (2012, 86).

Yet following the thought of political theorist Chantal Mouffe, self-love, as has been conceptualized in this chapter, does not appear to signal feminist solidarity or feminist goals. In her words:

for feminists who are committed to a political project whose aim is to struggle against the forms of subordination which exist in many social
relations...an approach that permits us to understand how the subject is constructed through different discourses and subject positions is certainly more adequate than one that reduces our identity to one single position - be it class, race, or gender. (Mouffe 1996, 329)

In closing the topic of self-love subjectivity, I wonder whether the positive potential of self-love, as expressed in black feminist love politics, can be recovered by women enmeshed in postfeminist media culture, especially regarding beauty. Can narratives of self-love promoted by media culture ever be fulfilling? It is possible that within these narratives of self-love, self-respect is what the subjects may be struggling toward to navigate the cruel optimism of beauty in a postfeminist, digital age.

**Self-Love and Self-Respect: Moving Beyond Self-Esteem and Narcissism**

This project has discussed the entanglement of meanings of self-esteem with self-love in both consumer culture and in self-love subjectivity. In an effort to move beyond self-esteem and narcissism, it is important to examine the relation between self-respect and self-love. In so doing, I propose a productive way that women can approach themselves and their beauty/bodies while participating in contemporary culture.

Psychologist Ellen Langer distinguishes between self-esteem and self-respect, commenting that, unlike self-esteem, "self-respect may hold the key to achieving the peace of mind we seek" (Langer 2013). Self-esteem is centered on evaluation, which can be positive or negative, and places emphasis on attaining external goals, the accomplishment of which is evaluated both by the individual and others (family, friends, society). In addition, "Our culture is concerned with matters of self-esteem" (Langer 2013). In contrast, self-respect is about "lik[ing] ourselves because of who we are and not because of what we can or cannot do" (Langer 2013).
Feminist philosopher Robin S. Dillon offers an understanding of self-respect that centers on women having "a secure sense of our own worth" (1992, 52). She describes philosopher Stephen Darwall's views of "recognition self-respect" and "appraisal self-respect" to set the stage for her own conception of "feminist recognition self-respect" (Dillon 1992, 62). Although a philosophical concept, appraisal self-respect can be likened to the psychological concept of self-esteem in that it has an evaluative feature, representing an attitude of positive appraisal of oneself and confidence in one’s merit as a person. Individuals with appraisal self-respect judge that they measure up to some standards of excellence, believe they are successfully pursuing a worthwhile plan of life, regard their accomplishments as admirable, and have confidence that they will continue to do and to be what they think it is appropriate and good to do and to be. (Dillon 1992, 54)

Darwall's second notion of respect -- recognition self-respect -- means, by contrast, "understanding oneself to be a person with the same intrinsic value and standing in the moral community as every other person and unconditionally owed the equal recognition respect of all persons" (Dillon 1992, 55). Dillon's concept of feminist recognition self-respect centrally "involve[s] cherishing and treasuring myself for who I am" (Dillon 1992, 55), and comprises self-care, acceptance, patience, and understanding. Importantly, it is distinct from both self-love and narcissism. Unlike self-love, feminist recognition self-respect is relational, an "encompassing vision of the self-in-relation-to-others which distinguishes self-respect from the more narrowly focused self-love" (Dillon 1992, 61). And distinguishing itself from narcissism, it argues that "one can pay too much of the wrong kind of attention to oneself and that is not what self-respect involves…[one can be] self-obsessed and such a tension is self-destructively distorting" (Dillon 1992, 63).
In contemporary consumer culture, the conflation of self-esteem and self-love has been problematic for women's relation to beauty and their bodies. Arguably, a feminist conception of self-respect, such as that proposed by Dillon, if commodified by consumer culture in the same way as self-esteem and self-love have been, might pose an obstacle rather than a remedy to the dilemmas posed by love your body/love yourself discourse. On the other hand, it also might offer a potential for disengaging women from their current entanglement with that discourse. How feminists and media scholars favoring this view might study such conceptions of self-respect in relation to beauty and self-love suggests a direction for future research, as discussed later. This sort of work could also engage the question of whether values, practices, and feelings of self-love can be reclaimed regarding beauty and the body, moving away from its current neoliberal meanings and towards loving oneself as a platform for loving others.

**Limitations of this Research**

While this project offers important findings about women's experiences with beauty in a postfeminist, digital age, it has several limitations. The subject pool was small, which allowed for an in-depth study; however, a larger sample size could allow for an expanded analysis and a more diverse subject pool in terms of race. Additionally, the study relied on non-participant observation due to the IRB's decision not to approve my design for interviews because of the sensitive nature of the communities' conversations. An interview approach would have allowed me to explore with the subjects more directly their meanings of beauty in relation to self-love.

Finally, this project focused on the intersections of American feminism, American women, and the American beauty industry, as they, together, capture a specific history.
Since feminist media studies scholars have discussed postfeminism as characterizing media culture in the UK, the subject pool could be expanded to include women there, which would allow for a discussion of the flows of "love your body" messages in global consumer culture, especially since the sites of inquiry discussed in Chapter 4 are also global media products. In addition, it would enable greater understanding if/how there is a transnational gendered subjectivity around meanings and practices of self-love.

**Areas for Future Research**

Five areas emerged as important for future research. The first addresses race as an extension of the current study; the second is self-respect in relation to self-love in online communities; the third is "love your body" discourse in consumer culture texts of ostensibly unaltered images of female beauty; the fourth is "fempowerment" advertisements that attempt to move beyond the obsessive focus on the female body; and the fifth how positive social change can be realized regarding postfeminism and beauty in the future.

Across the online subjects in this study, there was support of postfeminist values and self-branding as well as expressions of hope and struggle. This study suggests that the communication of the raced subjects (e.g., African American, Latina) and their participation in the online communities may indicate a slightly different approach to beauty and self-love than that of their Caucasian peers. A larger sample size could offer the opportunity for important future research. The raced subjects come to the communities with a stated desire to grow self-love that they feel is already in them, not that they lack self-love and come to the communities to develop it. This might suggest that their views of self-love draw on the sentiments expressed by feminist writer and
activist Audre Lorde, who wrote, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (1988, 131). Moreover, they present themselves as more than just bodies that need to be changed: they talk about returning to college, changing careers, trying new things (like overcoming stage fright to sing in front of crowds), being an army wife, and working in non-profits. And, while they describe a desire to have bodies that look like those of pop singer Rihanna and of the African American and Latina contestants on ANTM, they do not express the same sense of failure with not achieving this look as the Caucasian contestants do with those media figures that they want to emulate. This could suggest that they see cultural figures as aspirational but not as much for direct emulation. It could also speak to the difference in representation in postfeminist media culture, which promotes a Caucasian ideal.

The second area for future research aligns closely with the current study. It would focus on how meanings and practices of self-respect occur via women's online participation around beauty, the body, and self-love. This project would also take postfeminist self-branding into account; that is, how can/do women access self-respect in postfeminist media culture without replicating consumer culture practices and values? Moreover, does participation in digital culture (a space that can promote narcissism) help or hinder their efforts towards developing a sense of self-respect?

The third area for future research would consider a new phenomenon that appears to be emerging in consumer culture: non-manipulated images of beauty, such as the unretouched January 2014 adverts by American Eagle (Figs. 63 and 64), the February 2014 makeup free portraits of celebrities such as Scarlett Johansson (Fig. 65) and Kate Winslet in Vanity Fair, and the celebrities' similar makeup free selfies (such as those by
Beyoncé [Fig. 66], Lady Gaga [Fig. 67], Gwyneth Paltrow, and Zooey Deschanel). These images seem to affirm the cultural awareness that has been generated in women about consumer culture, that beauty images have been manipulated to present unattainable beauty as if it is attainable. The new unmanipulated images are presented as anti-glamour shots: they denote that flaws in women's appearance are what authentic beauty is about, and they create a sense of intimacy between audiences and the women in the images based on shared beauty issues. These images, which connote celebrity beauty as equivalent to other women’s beauty, downplay the fact that the women who are performing here are familiar with being photographed, or may have a team of managers/stylists who know how to use devices like lighting, body positioning, camera angles, and perhaps light makeup (e.g., concealer) to present their image. Everyday women may not have access to these techniques, rendering their unmanipulated images inherently distinct from those of celebrities.

Given this new area for “love your body” discourse, it would be important to consider how female audiences interpret these images of presumably unmanipulated beauty. By studying the online communication and interviewing women and girls who live in countries where these images circulate, insight into the following questions could be gained: Do you now compare yourselves to these unmanipulated beauty images of women rather than aspirational mass distributed images of dominant beauty? How do feel that these images express the discourse around “love your body/love yourself” promoted by the beauty industry? It is one thing if women compare themselves to aspirational media images of women and feel that they do not look "good enough" compared to photoshopped texts. But, what does it mean for them to compare themselves to seemingly
unmanipulated images and still feel that they do not measure up? Could this type of promotion by and of celebrities be even more problematic than the glossy images that have been the mainstay of advertisements in consumer culture? What does this seeming non-manipulation of images mean as a strategy of global beauty brands/celebrities in terms of being part of a shifting norm of beauty?

The fourth area for future research is the recent "fempowerment" advertisements by brands such as Always and Verizon, which seem to indicate cultural critique and a desire to improve female self-esteem, much like the Dove Campaign. Instead of focusing on the body, they stress how gendered discourses in girls' everyday lives impact what girls and women do and think. Always' "Like a Girl" highlights how phrases such as "throw like a girl" connote negative meanings about female physical ability and female strength, while Verizon's "Inspire Her Mind" zeroes in on how interpersonal interactions discourage girls from pursuing the STEM fields. Attempts such as these to move beyond the obsessive focus on the appearance of the female body via what appears to be a more multifaceted presentation of female identity offer a ripe area for study.

This leads into the fifth avenue for future research, namely, how media scholars who identify postfeminism as problematic might effect social change regarding the saturation of postfeminism and how it relates to meanings/practices of beauty for women in contemporary culture. Would it be productive to theorize that removing corporate involvement from their seeming attempts to remedy the "problem with beauty" could be a positive move away from the historical and current entanglements with feminism/feminists, beauty, and consumer culture? This project could consider the ways in which media studies scholars can collaborate with non-profit organizations (especially
those with a focus in media education, girls, and feminism) and alternative media outlets
to critically engage in discussion about postfeminism, beauty, and consumer
culture/popular culture messages. It could also examine the benefits and pitfalls of
organizing online for activism along these lines.
Appendix - Figures

Fig. 1. Kate Upton - *Vogue* cover

Fig. 2. Victoria's Secret "Love My Body Campaign"

Fig. 3. Comparison of Victoria's Secret and Dove Campaign for Real Beauty images
Fig. 4 and 5. Nancy Upton - American Apparel images

Fig. 6. Ralph Lauren photoshopped

Fig. 7. Model from photoshopped Ralph Lauren image in another advert
Fig. 8. Tracey Gold - People magazine cover

Fig. 9 and 10. The Body Shop adverts featuring Ruby
Fig. 11. Moss - Calvin Klein advert

Fig. 12. Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment)

Fig. 13. Fasting Buddha

Fig. 14. Siren
Fig. 15. Dancing Shiva

Fig. 16. CFRB Manifesto

Fig. 17. CFRB: "Wrinkled? Wonderful?"

Fig. 18. CFRB: "Gray? Gorgeous?"
Fig. 19. CFRB: "Flawed? Flawless?"

"Full?"

Fig. 20. CFRB: "Half Empty? Half Full?"

Fig. 21. CFRB: "Oversized? Outstanding?"

Fig. 22. Dove Firming advert
Vloggers of Project Lifesize

Fig. 23. PL: Meghan

Fig. 24. PL: Gretchen

Fig. 25. PL: Alexis

Fig. 26. PL: Gili

Fig. 27. PL: Shan

Fig. 28. PL: Crystal
Fig. 29. PL: Meghan's recent Instagram image

Fig. 30. PL: Meghan's recent Twitter image

Bloggers of ana_circle

Fig. 31. AC: ajonadiet

Fig. 32. AC: ed_surreal
Fig. 33. AC: fishgirl415

Fig. 34. AC: littlemisspoo

Fig. 35. AC: mis_ana_thropic

Fig. 36. AC: misa_mc
Fig. 37. AC: run4skinny

Fig. 38. AC: image posted by run4skinny

Fig. 39. AC: image posted by run4skinny

Fig. 40. Example of thinspiration
YouTube Weight Loss Community Vloggers

Fig. 41. WLS: Jen pre-op

Fig. 42. WLS: Jen post-op

Fig. 43. WLS: Stephanie pre-op

Fig. 44. WLS: Stephanie post-op
Fig. 45. WLS: Nicole pre-op

Fig. 46. WLS: Nicole post-op

Fig. 47. WLS: Katie pre-op

Fig. 48. WLS: Katie post-op
Fig. 49. WLS: Kristen pre-op

Fig. 50. WLS: Kristen post-op

Fig. 51. WLS: Martha pre-op

Fig. 52. WLS: Martha post-op
Fig. 57. WLS: Kelly pre-op

Fig. 58. WLS: Kelly post-op

Fig. 59. WLS: Micola pre-op

Fig. 60. WLS: Micola post-op
Fig. 61. WLS: Nicole - selfie

Fig. 62. WLS: Debbie - "sexy" image

Fig. 63. American Eagle unretouched image

Fig. 64. American Eagle unretouched image
Fig. 65. Scarlett Johansson - *Vanity Fair* makeup free selfie

Fig. 66. Beyoncé makeup free selfie

Fig. 67. Lady Gaga makeup free selfie
References


http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2012/12-123.html.


Random House.


Press.


Gorman, Bill. 2011. “‘The Vampire Diaries,’ ‘Gossip Girl,’ ‘90210,’ ‘Supernatural’ & ‘America’s Next Top Model’ Renewed By The CW.” *TVbytheNumbers*. http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2011/04/26/%e2%80%9cthe-vampire-diaries%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%9cgossip-girl%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%9c90210%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%9csupernatural%e2%80%9d-americas-next-top-model-renewed-by-the-cw/90700/.


Knutsen, Ingrid Ruud, Laura Terragni, and Christina Foss. 2013. “Empowerment and Bariatric Surgery Negotiations of Credibility and Control.” Qualitative Health


Richardson, Abigail, and Elizabeth Cherry. 2011. “Anorexia as a Lifestyle: Agency through Pro-Anorexia Websites.” In *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the*


surgery.html?source=fb.


