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APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy 24, no. 2 is dedicated to celebrating and reflecting on the work of Kate Manne in her 2024 book, *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia*. The issue showcases six invited commentaries on the book, followed by the author's response.

In "Go Big or Go Home: Kate Manne Directs Her Philosophical Gaze at Fatphobia," Alison Reiheld highlights key facets of Manne's takedown of prevailing views on fatness. As Reiheld notes, Manne's text productively identifies fatphobia not as an individual problem, but as a structural phenomenon in need of structural intervention. Reiheld outlines methodological continuities across Manne's philosophical work, and considers in particular how, in addition to her systematic challenging of faulty arguments about the harms of fatness, the autobiographical aspect of Manne's methodology allows for showing the actual suffering that comes from real-life, normalized experiences of fatphobia.

In "What Is Body Reflexivity? A Critical Assessment of Manne's Alternative to Body Positivity and Body Neutrality," Céline Leboeuf focuses on Manne's reflection on longstanding notions of body positivity and body neutrality within movements against fatphobia. As the names suggest, the body positivity and body neutrality movements promote having positive or neutral attitudes toward one's body, respectively. While showing there is much to be learned from the concepts, Manne provides critiques of both body positivity and body neutrality, and offers instead a concept of body reflexivity, which encourages shifting attention from judging bodies to suspending judgment. Here Leboeuf raises two questions: first, whether Manne's view sufficiently portrays the merits of body positivity; and second, whether all aspects of the distinction between body reflexivity and body neutrality are fully clear.

In "Hungry for More Intersectionality: A Review of *Unshrinking* by Kate Manne," Clarisse Paron highlights the importance of Manne's work to challenge fatphobia, in particular praising Manne's fourth chapter on "Demoralizing Fatness," which challenges presumptions of individuals' duties to lose weight (or stay skinny). Paron considers possible expansions of Manne's work to connect with other intersectional analyses, exploring in particular the connections between fatphobia, ableism, racism, and heteronormativity. On the connection with ableism, Paron underscores the shared history of eugenics practices of targeting individuals with size and other physical and psychological impairments.

In "The Fallacies and Figleaves of Fatphobia: Expanding on Arguments in Manne's *Unshrinking*," Vanessa Voss considers Manne's exploration of fat stigma in academia as a whole and philosophy especially. Building on Manne's focus on fatphobia in philosophical works from Plato and Aristotle onward, Voss expands the scope to argue that fatphobic beliefs and actions perpetuate bad reasoning, bad rhetoric, and thought clichés. Voss summarizes her argument as follows: fatphobia is a "threat to the health of one's critical thinking skills. *And aren't you worried about your health*?"

In "The Future of Facing Fatphobia," Cheryl Frazier commends *Unshrinking* for its success in bringing fat scholarship and activism into conversation with philosophy with such care. Frazier considers Manne's identification of the harms of fatphobia as laudable, while suggesting that, if fat liberation is our goal, we need also to consider all the things that are right and valuable about being fat. Frazier outlines the importance of framing philosophical conversations about fatness in ways which do not preclude celebrations of fatness and recognitions of its benefit.

In our final commentary piece of the issue, "What I Love about *Unshrinking*, Why *Unshrinking* Makes Me Sad, and Six Things I'd Like to Talk about with Kate Manne," Samantha Brennan describes her own sadness and anger at the contexts which gave rise to some of Manne's first-person descriptions of the harms of fatphobia, including those which brought Manne to feel worried enough about how others would think about her body that she "flinched from the prospect" of usual book tour appearances. Noting her thorough appreciation for the book, Brennan outlines six points she'd like to talk about with Manne: 1) the connection between bodily shame and moral shame; 2) how different experiences of fatness in a range of sizes can be complexly related to shame; 3) possibilities for more expansive understandings of body positivity; 4) fatphobia and overstating the effects of parenting; 5) the variations in experiences of hunger; and 6) the harmful effects of fatphobia on stopping fat people from involvement in exercise.

The issue concludes with Kate Manne's response to the commentaries, in which she takes up the questions raised about body reflexivity and positivity, the relationships between fatness and disability, and the weaponization of health discourse against fat people. She concludes by reflecting on her own positionality, and with thanks to her commentators for their contributions.

ABOUT *APA STUDIES ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY*

APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. The newsletter is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of *APA Studies* articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender, including the editor(s) of the newsletter, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

2. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editors: Ami Harbin, Oakland University, at aharbin@oakland.edu, and Barrett Emerick, St. Mary's College, at bmemerick@smcm.edu.

3. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1; submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

ARTICLES

Go Big or Go Home: Kate Manne Directs Her Philosophical Gaze at Fatphobia

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Scholars in the humanities and public intellectuals have long contributed to rigorous thinking on fatness that is critical of prevailing social and medical discourse. Some of the most publicly and academically influential books on this topic in recent memory are those from sociologist Sabrina Strings and public intellectual Aubrey Gordon; somewhat farther back, legal scholar Paul Campos and medical sociologists Abigail Saguy and Deborah Lupton, and farther back still, Marilyn Wann's foundational fat activist tome, *Fat!So?*

Where are philosophers who engage with fatness, whether within our discipline, interdisciplinarily,[1] or with the general public? As the moral panic over "the obesity epidemic" pairs with new weight loss uses of semaglutide drugs like Wegovy and Ozempic, what do philosophers bring to fat studies and public discourse on fatness? What do we bring to the table when we finally come to the table?

After a growing number of philosophical articles on fatness in journals and book chapters over the last decade and a bit, we are beginning to see book-length philosophical treatments. In summer of 2024, two books on fatness authored by philosophers made their way into the librasphere: Rekha Nath's *Why It's OK to Be Fat* and Kate Manne's *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia*. While Nath's work is beautifully concise, Manne's work has spilled from this full-length book into a wide array of other media. In recent years, in part because of the broad audience she gained with *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Manne's work has reached well beyond the academy, positioning her as both a scholar and a public intellectual.

In this critical essay, I will not attempt to give a complete summary of Manne's thought-provoking book. I will lay out some important pieces of Manne's argument, discuss how the argument remains essentially philosophical and methodologically similar to her previous work, and also address one of the features of her writing that often is seen as unphilosophical (but that, I argue here, should be seen as methodologically strong not only for rhetorical purposes but also for philosophical purposes).

1. IT'S ABOUT THE SYSTEM: HOW THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF *UNSHRINKING* PARALLELS MANNE'S ARGUMENTATION IN PREVIOUS WORK

Manne's book is subtitled "How to face fatphobia." And while she intends it to make a difference in how we behave, any author writing on this subject is first going to have to find a way to persuade people that the way we behave now is at best misguided and at worst vicious. They will have to address a slew of empirical claims that underpin and purportedly justify our collective, and individual, bad

behavior towards fat folks. The philosopher's tool of choice in the slog towards better collective understanding has long been argumentation.

Indeed, the vast majority of Manne's *Unshrinking* is perhaps best described as a rigorous takedown of prevailing views on fatness, with an aim to replace it with something better. As she writes in the Introduction, this book is "primarily a political and structural, as opposed to a psychological and individualistic, intervention. . . . I believe that when it comes to fatphobia, the solution is not to improve our self-image or love our bodies better. It is nothing less than to *remake the world* to properly fit fat bodies, and to effect the socially transformative recognition that there is truly nothing wrong with us" (8–9). Like her *Down Girl: A Logic of Misogyny* and its successor *Entitled*, Manne is focused here on systems, and not just individuals. In her previous work, Manne argued that misogyny is the enforcement arm of the system of norms and values that is patriarchy. As such, it can be enforced by anyone using the justifications and structures provided. Feminism attempts to critique, dismantle, and replace those norms and structures and mechanisms. This explains how anyone of any gender can be misogynist, and how anyone of any gender can be feminist.

Philosophically, *Unshrinking* takes a similar approach, framing fatphobia as "an inherently structural phenomenon, which sees people in fatter bodies navigating a different world, containing numerous distinct material, social, and institutional barriers to our flourishing" (12). In an important move that also bears similarity to moves she made in *Down Girl* where Manne considered how all the pieces of misogyny and patriarchy fit together into a kind of self-reinforcing justificatory logic, Manne notes that "particular instances of fatphobia may . . . feel like dispensing sound medical advice, picking the best person for the job, or objectively assessing the abilities of your pupils" (13). Finally, in classic form for analysis of systems, Manne notes that if everyone woke up tomorrow "magically free from fatphobic attitudes," the world would still need to change "to accommodate fat bodies and actively support us" (13).[2]

This kind of attention to structures and patterns of justification and of behaviors is something that philosophers are especially good at, though we are by no means the only discipline that does this. What Manne brings to the table is in part a laser-like focus on the arguments used to support and implement fatphobia, a keen awareness of how these interlock and mutually justify each other, and the use of argumentation to dismantle them and build something in their place.

Manne is extremely careful to correctly characterize[3] the extent and nature of mainstream social and medical claims about fat folks, and to give evidence that these are in fact the main claims about fat folks, even while she critiques these views and provides reasons to believe they are faulty and thus make for poor behavior indeed. The claims she addresses throughout this book are broad-ranging, but boil down to the following:

- Fat folks are seen as fundamentally lazy, even seen as intellectually slow, in stereotypes dating back hundreds of years to the European enlightenment when thin-ness came to mean clever-ness and quick-ness[4]
- Fatness ("obesity") is seen as unhealthy (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Fat folks are frequently seen as morally bad, held responsible for their own fatness, and often denied compassion, respect, fair opportunities in employment, social supports, and healthcare (this theme appears in every chapter, though most notably Chapter 4: "Demoralizing Fatness")
- Fat folks are seen as disgusting, gross, and often as ugly and undesirable (Chapters 4 and 5 in particular, though not only)
- Fat folks are seen as weak and out of control over their own desires, and can show the opposite by dieting and sticking to diets (Chapters 7 and 8)

One reason that Manne lays these out is to support her overarching claim, drawing in part on the work of Madeline Ward to argue that fatphobia is part and parcel of a system oppressing fat folks. And consonant with most arguments about oppression, Manne wants us to see how pervasive these beliefs and corresponding behaviors are, how they are built into systems and structures, into institutions and practices and buildings, as well as into individual habits of thought and action.

2. THE ARGUMENT CLINIC: HOW MANNE USES ARGUMENTATION TO TAKE DOWN ARGUMENTS ABOUT HEALTH AND FATNESS

I come to this book from both feminist philosophy and medical ethics. So, permit me to indulge in a deep dive into the aspects of Manne's work most relevant to mine, since it also allows us to see the philosophical skills Manne brings to the table.

Manne does a fine job across several chapters of showing how health and morality claims about fat folks are used to cast fat folks as unfit parents of both humans and pets (32–23), to deny them access to surgeries which they could not get access to unless they lost weight which almost never happened and thus was long-term denial of care (31–32), and to deny access to prenatal care on the grounds that fat pregnant persons are too "high risk" (27). The list is much larger than these, in terms of negative impacts of fatphobia on fat folks, too large to summarize here. But of particular interest to me in thinking about philosophical methodology is Manne's critique of the reasoning and evidence that people use to support the twin claims that fatness is unhealthy, and that people have control over their fatness by means that would improve health.

Manne uses her storehouse of philosophical skills to, among other things, argue plausibly for flaws in the causal reasoning of anti-fat health claims. It's a classic

aspect of causal arguments that when two things, A and B, are correlated, we have to consider at least four logical possibilities: A causes B, B causes A, some third thing C causes the correlation between A and B, or, well, it's just coincidence. While Manne herself doesn't explain it exactly this way, she deploys these logical possibilities in her argumentative strategy in Chapter 2, which focuses on health claims as justifications for treating fat people as inherently unhealthy which thus purports to justify weight loss in the name of fat folks' own welfare.

Manne takes on the design of hallmark studies of fatness and ill health, thereby casting doubt on the seemingly self-evident nature of the claim that fatness correlates strongly with ill health (37–40). She also mounts a case that correlation plausibly does not equal causation when it comes to fatness and ill health, even when that association is present, by giving alternative causal explanations for the same poor health outcomes.

Manne raises several studies that should make us question whether, for instance, fatness causes diabetes (A leads to B) or diabetes causes fatness (B leads to A), noting that high amounts of insulin in the blood as a person's type 2 diabetes is developing can precede and cause weight gain even as many fat people never develop diabetes (45). She also points out that there are studies indicating that the associations themselves are suspect, noting, for instance, that while some research shows all-cause mortality is higher for fat folks, studies looking at weight loss do not show that weight loss necessarily lowers all-cause mortality, and specifically that physical activity and fitness level have vastly more impact on all-cause mortality than body weight (49). This should at least weaken the case for pushing for weight loss.

Manne also makes several arguments along the lines of "some third thing C causes both A and B," proposing that fatphobia and specifically anti-fat stigma can contribute to some of the worrisome health outcomes that have typically been attributed to fatness simpliciter. An intriguing study indicated that patients with "high internalized weight stigma" were three times more likely to have metabolic syndrome—several of high blood pressure, high blood glucose, abnormal cholesterol, and high waist circumference—and six times more likely to have high triglycerides compared with participants who had much lower internalized weight stigma (51). And, the harms of weight cycling, which occurs when diets fail (which they nearly always do, leading to weight loss followed by weight regain), are widely documented and include many of the same outcomes attributed to fatness (40–44). In addition, Manne argues that since weight stigma causes fat folks to avoid seeking medical care, it results in delays in cancer screenings, a finding well-supported by research and which could independently explain higher death rates from cancer (52).[5] Manne also notes that there are clear correlations between exercise avoidance and experiencing weight stigma in fitness settings or while exercising publicly outdoors (52–53), when exercise has enormous health benefits regardless of body size and composition. All of these give plausible reasons to think that some third thing, C, is causing a correlation between A and B (fatness and poor health outcomes).

Manne gets really clear about this in a lovely little section where she summarizes a series of causal relationships that provide alternate explanations. Here are a few:

> Higher weight → Weight cycling → poorer health
>
> Poorer health → Higher weight
>
> Higher weight → Weight stigma → Stress → Poorer health (53–54).

And so, she argues, what we do know is that the health risks of fatness have been consistently overstated, carelessly reasoned about, and that *independently of these*, fat folks "still deserve support, compassion, and adequate healthcare" (55).

In the process of debunking the empirical claims that underpin health claims, in particular, Manne goes on to cast doubt on the widely held notion that we should conflate health with worth, saying at the end of Chapter 2, "there should be no shame in not being healthy. And a person's good health should never be a prerequisite for their being treated with empathy and kindness and respect" (58).[6]

While formal logical argumentation and a keen grasp of taxonomies of arguments have long been the philosopher's tool of choice, they are not the only philosophical tool that Manne wields. She also wields stories and personal experience, both autobiographical and the stuff of others' lives, as legitimate aspects of philosophical reflection. These philosophical tools are seen too often by mainstream traditional philosophy as rhetorical moves that undermine the strength of claims.

3. STORIES MATTER: PHILOSOPHY HAS A PROBLEM WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE AS METHOD, BUT THEY ARE REFLECTIVE TOOLS AND EPISTEMIC RESOURCES

Study after study has shown that to be persuaded, a typical person is more likely to be moved by a combination of stories and reasons than by reasons alone.[7] All too often, such stories are pooh-poohed in both philosophy and the hard sciences as both biased and "merely anecdata." But stories have a role to play in reasoning, not merely persuasion.

If philosophy is ever to speak to the problems of the real world, it must engage the real world as it is. And while statistics and larger social patterns help us to see that, we also need stories to understand those patterns and their impacts. When I first began presenting at conferences on trans folks' issues with accessing basic medical care—not even gender-affirming care, but the same medical care anyone with a body might need—I would present what I thought were compelling philosophical arguments about principles and patterns. And yet, at conferences a clinician would inevitably stand up to say, "That sounds awful, but no one I know would treat someone like that" or "I don't want to be part of this, but how can I know what that looks like in practice?" Formal argumentation with allegedly

objective population-level data is both argumentatively and persuasively insufficient. It just doesn't provide enough to do more. It certainly doesn't show us enough about what behaviors to change. And let's be clear: the subtitle of Manne's book isn't just "what's wrong with fatphobia"—it's "how to face fatphobia." We need to know what it looks like at the base level to do better: in our schools, in our workplaces, in our clinics, and yes, in our families and at our dinner tables.

In addition, to take stories seriously, we must fight the now-classic tendency in our discipline to dismiss insights rooted in personal experience.[8] Personal experience is a source of knowledge for oneself. Testimony about personal experience is a source of knowledge for others. Epistemology has long dealt with personal testimony, culminating in recent work by Kristie Dotson, Miranda Fricker, José Medina, Kate Abramson, and others on aspects of epistemic injustice connected to personal experience, whether it be testimonial smothering, testimonial injustice, or gaslighting.

Throughout *Unshrinking*, Manne uses narratives of personal experience to show how, and how much, fat folks suffer under fatphobia. She begins and ends autobiographically, and includes the lived experience of others.

In the Introduction, she opens the first paragraph saying, "I should have been thrilled" (3) and goes on to recount how, during the publicity for *Down Girl*, as it was gaining steam, her publisher suggested Manne go on a publicity tour in London with bookstore readings and television appearances. "I flinched from the prospect. I felt too fat to be a feminist in public. I felt too big to speak out about the 'down girl' moves that teach girls and women to be small, meek, and quiet" (3). It is this, among other experiences, that set Manne on the path of writing *Unshrinking*.

Immediately, Manne has acknowledged her own membership in the group about which she writes: fat folks. This is important both as a philosophical method and as a rhetorical method. Philosophically, it taps into standpoint epistemology, which posits that folks in particular social locations have special access to knowledge at least about what it is like to be in that social location, and sometimes even greater knowledge because they have to be able to move back and forth between what their lives look like to them and what they can expect their lives to look like to others. Rhetorically, it is extremely fraught for a person who is not a member of a group to speak about and especially to speak for that group. Manne takes care not to conflate her experience with all experiences and to bring in the experiences of folks for whom fatness manifests differently. But it's worth noting here that when Manne first began doing audiovisual publicity for *Unshrinking*, the fat studies social media circles I am part of all blew up with people asking who Kate Manne was and why someone so small was speaking for them. Others pointed out that she acknowledged she'd been much larger in the past, and is still perceived by others as fat.[9] When dealing with a topic like this as a member of a group affected by the topic, it is valuable to acknowledge that membership. And it is more epistemically virtuous to do so than to persist in the belief that not being a member of the group somehow makes you more epistemically virtuous, as though you have no corresponding group membership of your own. Being thin certainly doesn't make one a more reliable knower about fatness than a fat person.

But Manne doesn't just rely on her own testimony. She lays out the lived experiences of others. Indeed, the very first paragraph of Chapter 1 tells the tale of Jen Curran, who was prescribed weight loss in the form of vague recommendations to diet and to exercise, as a way to restore her kidneys to health because during her recent pregnancy, she shed protein in her urine. Curran asked her kidney specialist, "And if I lose weight, the protein will go away?" Yes, she was told, come back in four months. She felt misgivings about this response and sought a second opinion a month later. She was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a bone marrow cancer (15–16). A four-month wait for weight loss that is statistically unlikely ever to come might well have cost her life. Manne follows Curran's story with that of someone whose diagnosis came too late. Jan Fraser lost sixty pounds rapidly without trying to. Jan's sister, Laura, told Jan she looked great. But in fact, Jan had vaginal bleeding and near-constant pelvic pain that made it hard to eat. Finally, someone she saw ordered blood work. She was admitted to intensive care for sky-high calcium levels. There, an MRI revealed a huge mass in her abdomen, and metastatic cancer in her pelvis, bladder, and lungs. As Manne puts it, "Jan lived just six months longer. She continued to waste away throughout her rounds of chemotherapy. And people continued to compliment her on her weight loss" (17).

These kinds of stories—Manne's own and those of others—persist throughout the book as exemplars of patterns. We ignore stories at our peril, especially when used for exemplification. As public health giant Paul Farmer once said,

> the experience of suffering, it is often noted, is not effectively conveyed by statistics or graphs. The "texture" of dire affliction is perhaps best felt in the gritty details of biography, and so I introduce [stories of people whose health was catastrophically damaged by social forces].
>
> [They] are anything but "anecdotal." For the epidemiologist as well as the political analyst, they suffered and died in exemplary fashion. [Others] living in similar circumstances can expect to meet similar fates . . . stories illustrate some of the mechanisms through which large-scale social forces crystallize into the sharp, hard surfaces of individual suffering.[10]

This is one excellent methodological use of narrative and is one way that Manne uses both the stories of others and her own: to embody the larger patterns she also describes, as well as to give them epistemic authority and detail. That detail—the detail that folks in my initial audiences on trans access to health care craved—is necessary for not only persuasion and rhetorical force but for reflection and understanding. Medical anthropologist Clifford Geertz

writes about this when he points out that we hit trouble if descriptions are too "thin": that very thinness makes the description "insufficient" to the epistemic task at hand and can even be "misleading." To get the right of it, we need "thick descriptions" based on what "local informants" can tell us about "local behaviors" and truths. Those thick descriptions are narratives. Those local informants are the narrators of their own lives.

The case for philosophical use of narratives, thick descriptions, and testimony is strong. Of course, what sense do we make of circumstances where personal testimony sometimes falls on both sides of an issue? We have several options. One, some cases may not be exemplars, but instead outliers. This is an issue that Manne explicitly addresses at several points, suggesting for instance that many people's personal testimony of effective weight loss clearly per the larger evidence are not exemplars but are outliers. A second option also exists when personal testimony falls on both sides of an issue: that personal testimony is, sometimes, not a result of insight but a result of self-deception and of deception of the self by others. This is, in fact, the topic of Chapter 7, "Dinner by Gaslight," in which Manne essentially argues that continuing to pursue weight loss when weight is not so damaging and weight loss is so difficult is surely not the result of believing the evidence of our senses.

Another aspect that requires personal testimony because it requires access to states of mind and emotional status is Manne's discussion, shot throughout the book, of pleasure and pain with respect to food. She raises this explicitly in Chapter 3, "Demoralizing Fatness," when she notes the way that we restrict ourselves with respect to food based in part on how we judge ourselves morally, and sometimes punish ourselves with food for negative moral judgments about ourselves that have nothing to do with our bodies (80–81). Manne delves into these themes in Chapter 8, "The Authority of Hunger," speaking of suffering caused by dieting, and the way that the framework of dieting and weight loss makes hunger-related suffering into a good thing, and food-related pleasure into a bad thing. As subjective states, we need thick descriptions and narratives to understand suffering and pleasure. Even those who have been gaslit into dieting, by themselves or others, still describe hunger pangs and other kinds of suffering such as dizziness or fainting with calorie restriction, never mind the life-long consequences of weight loss surgery. How much stronger must the gaslighting (Chapter 7) be when it can make us accept the kind of pain and suffering that is a bodily imperative to stop (Chapter 8)?

The interplay of subjective experience and objective pattern is rich in *Unshrinking*. And while some would use the presence of personal narrative to dismiss the more traditionally philosophical argumentation, I suggest that is a terrible waste of both modes of reflection and understanding.

At the very end of the book, Manne brings the use of personal experience full circle. Writing in the Conclusion, she says,

> At the end of this book, you may be wondering how I now feel about my body. . . . My story is still very much being written. And in part it is because it is not in bodily self-love, but rather a shift in perspective, in which I have found my freedom.
>
> The thought that has helped me the most, in navigating all of this, is that *my body is for me*. Your body is for you. My body is not decoration. Your body is not decoration. . . . This notion—"body reflexivity," as I'll call it—differs from both body positivity and body neutrality. . . . It is compatible with finding oneself beautiful, or sexy—or not, as the case may be. We may decline to think about our appearance much whatsoever. . . . We are not responsible for pleasing others.
>
> A natural corollary: your reaction to my body is not my problem—or the point, or salvation. The body is not an object for correction or colonization or consumption. I am sorry, not sorry, if my body leaves you cold, or you find it to be wanting. (195–96)

Manne wraps with a concrete example of how the intellectual journey captured in this book has affected her life. Whereas at the beginning, she was afraid to go fully clothed on a book promotion tour, at the last, she is no longer, and what she is sorry and not sorry for has shifted dramatically:

> I am sorry, not sorry, to have just bought my first swimsuit in more than twenty years. . . . I am not going to wear a cover-up. . . . And that feels like a minor miracle—even a happy ending. (208)

One might be forgiven for thinking that, with this much personal narrative, we've lost the structural element. But of course, all that is still present. The external gives rise to the internal, inculcating and reinforcing it at every turn until far too many of us have come to believe that what was created is what actually is the case.

In this context, we do the best we can. We need a little hope when we're living under oppression,[11] a little hope for how the larger scheme can change, but also for how we can live well within it. After all, as Kathryn Norlock argues in her beautiful article "Perpetual Struggle," we might never and probably will never reach a perfectly just world. What matters is how we go on with that imperfectionist realization, in solidarity. Kate Manne is calling for a more perfect world, but she knows we are living in the one we have. I'll take whatever improvements we-who-have-bodies can get.

4. THE UPSHOT

Is there more that could be said? Absolutely. I could talk in detail about Manne's commitment to intersectionality, which is effective in places but drops away in others. I could wax poetic about some nuances of language and how much I enjoyed realizing the chapter titles were plays on words. But no review can do everything and I've chosen my hills—hills on which I do not intend to die but from which I

hope to help you look down upon this book, which is very much worth your time, your courage, and your intellect.

Unshrinking is almost entirely about the systemic nature of fatphobia as an oppressive system that sends damaging messages and creates injurious structures that greatly harm actual persons. Like the norms of patriarchy within us and the mechanisms of misogyny outside of us that Manne laid out in *Down Girl*, fatphobia sinks into both how we think of ourselves and others and gets built into the world around us.

You might not believe that fatphobia is a problem. You might not believe that it's systemic, and structural, as well as individual. You might not believe that fatness is less deadly and less controllable than it's been portrayed to be. You might not believe that aesthetic judgments about fat bodies as ugly bodies are both socially constructed and changeable. You might not believe that fat folks deserve support, compassion, pleasure, delight, and health care in the bodies we have. You might not believe you've been sold a bill of goods that has led you to be gaslit, to gaslight yourself, and to gaslight others into weight loss culture. You might not believe that the suffering experienced under the coerced hunger of dieting deserves our attention.

But if you go into *Unshrinking* with an open mind, with a philosophical stance towards reasons and reasoning, with a willingness to consider fat people's stories as evidence and a willingness to reconsider what you think you know, you're going to both enjoy and learn from this book. Perhaps you'll be persuaded, as Manne says near the very end, that "We only have one body. So we will have to learn to live with it." Perhaps some of this will move you to learn to live well, to live a flourishing life with the body you have, to support others in doing so.

NOTES

1. Few of us have reached out into the interdisciplinary field of fat studies: the *Fat Studies Reader* (2010) won numerous awards and its fifty-three contributors included not a single philosopher. The same was true for the *The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies* (2021). Whereas medical ethics is rife with philosophers, fat studies is not. Perhaps the most famous foray of a philosopher addressing fatness was that by an eminence gris of medical ethics, Daniel Callahan, who in a 2013 article in a flagship medical ethics journal argued that clinicians should fat-shame patients in medical encounters for fat folks' own good if that's what it takes to get them to lose weight. Callahan's article received coverage the week of its publication in *USA Today*, *The Atlantic*, *The Huffington Post*, and various public-facing websites for schools of public health. His critics did not, whether the calls came from outside our house or inside of it.
2. The alert reader well versed in philosophy of disability will recognize some elements of the social construction of disability in this kind of claim. Manne addresses ways in which issues of fatness and disability overlap in Chapter 2, in her Conclusion, and in several of her copious endnotes, briefly. No one philosopher can do all things, but one of several wishes I have for philosophical considerations of fatness is that we give deeper thought to the way that society disables fat folks with institutions and our built environment.
3. As I think on the methodology here, I am mindful of philosopher of science Daniel Dennett's synthesis of Anatol Rapoport's rules for critical engagement, in Dennett's *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Successful Thinking*, the first of which is "You should attempt to re-express your target's position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says, "Thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way.""
4. This stereotype persists. Geoffrey Miller, a psychology professor permanently employed at University of New Mexico who was a visiting professor at New York University at the time, became famous in part for his 2013 Twitter post that read: "Dear obese Ph.D. applicants: if you didn't have the willpower to stop eating carbs, you won't have the willpower to do a dissertation #truth." While there was a massive backlash and Miller was censured by UNM, which prohibited him from supervising graduate students for a time, a study in the journal *Obesity* released at the same time concluded that thinner candidates were more likely to find postgraduate positions and more likely to receive positive recommendations than their obese peers, a bias particularly pronounced among women (Burmeister et al., "Weight Bias in Graduate School Admissions"). I sometimes wonder whether the hesitancy of philosophers to engage critically with issues of fatness is in part based in this stereotype that fat folks are intellectually incompetent, as though sympathy with fat folks inherently implies lack of intellectual rigor.
5. Health care providers looking at racial disparities in cancer mortality have learned to look at access to screenings as well as access to treatments, not just assuming that certain racial groups have higher race-based risk of dying of that cancer. The same move needs to be made with respect to studies of cancer mortality and fatness.
6. While Manne goes on to argue for the demoralization of fatness (Chapter 3), I could wish for more, here, of an examination of health and how it can be used as a "weapon." I'm mindful of avoiding the Reviewer 2 pitfall of critiquing an author for not having written the thing I wanted to write, so I'll just say that debates over health are not Manne's only focus, and note that there are critiques to be made of the very notion of "health" much less of our conflation of good health with moral worth. There are numerous excellent books and articles on the concept of health within philosophy of medicine, including most recently Elizabeth Barnes's *Health Problems*. The reader who wants specifics on theories of health and how they connect to fatness, may be interested in my own work on this (Reiheld, "Thin or Thick, Real or Ideal").
7. Yes, philosophers, though warped by our years in the discipline, are also subject to the way most folks reason. The same is true for clinicians, not just members of the general public. Any person who is a specialist in a particular society is, at root, a person who has acquired the norms of that society and possibly also fought hard to unlearn them with varying degrees of success.
8. The alert reader may recall the kerfuffles in the 2000s and 2010s that involved derogatorily labeling various subjects from feminist theory and women's studies to black studies to disability studies as "me studies," indicating that acknowledging the social location of the inquirer somehow undermines legitimate inquiry rather than being part of legitimate inquiry.
9. That some folks found Kate too slim to be speaking on fatness and for fat folks, while fatphobic comments on her articles and posts clearly showed that society at large found her plenty fat enough to be the target of fat jokes, was a bitter juxtaposition for me to observe.
10. Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence," 12.
11. See Katie Stockdale's work on hope under oppression, among others, for more on this.

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What Is Body Reflexivity? A Critical Assessment of Manne's Alternative to Body Positivity and Body Neutrality

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In *Unshrinking*, Kate Manne confronts fatphobia, tackling, among other issues, the challenges fat persons encounter in medical settings, the pressures that diet culture exerts on them, and the discrimination they meet daily. She concludes with reflections on how to fight fat oppression and addresses the body positivity and body neutrality movements, which have both positioned themselves as paths toward greater body acceptance. Manne reviews longstanding criticisms of these movements and articulates an alternative notion she dubs "body reflexivity" (196).

As a philosopher who has written on body positivity, I believe this is the most useful entry point to dialogue with Manne. As part of these preliminary remarks, I also want to acknowledge my positionality as someone who has been thin their entire life. Since the modern-day body positivity movement owes much to the fat acceptance and fat liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it is important to recognize this indebtedness along with the cooption of the movement by smaller persons today. In crafting my responses to Manne, I strive to be mindful of this history.

The body positivity movement, as its name suggests, promotes having a positive attitude toward one's body. To put things simply, proponents of body positivity encourage us to embrace a positive outlook to counter the "negativity" many of us experience because our bodies do not measure up to dominant beauty standards, including those regarding body shape and fatness. According to Manne, if this movement requires "feeling uniformly positive about own's own body," then it is not "realistic" (202). Indeed, it would fail to consider the lived experiences of trans people, "some of whom need or want to change their bodies in significant ways," or those of "chronically or disabled people who may feel, at least at moments, that their bodies have betrayed them" (202). I agree. Further, as Manne points out, body positivity so construed intersects with the broader notion of "toxic positivity"—that is, the mandate to only embrace positive emotions and reject negative ones. Such positivity ultimately backfires by forcing people to ignore their emotions about their bodies, which, in turn, prevents self-integration (204). Despite its intuitive pull, body positivity stifles the agency of those who struggle to marshal sunny feelings about their bodies.

In response to the perceived shortcomings of the body positivity movement, some have adopted a position called "body neutrality." Its defenders include such celebrities as the actor Jameela Jamila and, more recently, the singer and songwriter Lizzo. According to this alternative, we ought to adopt a neutral attitude toward our bodies. Drawing on psychological research, Manne worries that "a truly neutral attitude is hard to maintain" (204). She adds that this notion may, to some, be "tinged with negativity." Moreover, given how bodies are so often subject to scrutiny, body neutrality is "surely hard to conjure routinely" (204). Ultimately, according to Manne, "body neutrality seems at best a precarious retreat from judgment, not a stable resting place" (204). Or, to put a different spin on it, this position suffers from one of the same worries as body positivity, at least in its toxic expressions: it is impracticable.

Manne enters this debate by recommending a third notion: *body reflexivity*. This alternative "doesn't require one monolithic attitude toward our own body or that of others" (202). Instead, it "offers an escape from the apparently exhaustive options of positivity, negativity, or neutrality, by proposing a different focus" (205). As Manne puts it, "rather than changing how bodies are assessed, it urges us to transcend the mode of assessment entirely" (205). In other words, she encourages us to shift our attention from judging our bodies to suspending judgment. She elaborates that "a body is not something good or bad or neutral for people generally, but rather something that may suit and work better or worse for its denizen—in other words, the person who inhabits it" (205) since that person's "perspective on her body is the only one that matters" (205).

Manne cites the following merits of "body reflexivity." First, it is tied to a "politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be fat, or trans, or nonbinary, or queer, or disabled" (205). Second, "body reflexivity can recognize the psychological consequences of our current political predicament" (205). That is, it is understandable to "*feel* insecure" in a world in which some "are *made* to be insecure" in their embodiment (205, emphases in the original). That is, Manne wants to resist the toxic strands of body positivity, which fail to acknowledge the difficulties people living in non-normative bodies face. In so doing, she seeks to offer a more realistic option than the hotly debated movement has.

Body reflexivity mirrors Manne's structural critique of fatphobia. Just as fatphobia is not merely a matter of individual prejudice, so too making peace with one's body is not a requirement of individuals. Rather than insisting that we adopt either a positive or neutral attitude towards our bodies in the face of body shaming, Manne calls on us, as a society, to accommodate the diversity of human embodiment. Or, as she puts it, "the world has to be remade; it has to serve you better" (206). After describing body reflexivity, Manne briefly pauses on how to challenge fatphobia specifically. In that context, she asserts that we ought not to rely on "reforming beauty standards"

(206). Responding to the works of A.W. Eaton and Cheryl Frazier, who contend that beauty has a place in resisting fat oppression, Manne offers what she calls a "blunter and less nuanced" suggestion: "fuck beauty culture, along with diet culture" (206).[1] She enjoins us to "dress and look how you want not in the name of any kind of beauty but for the sake of being the most yourself that you can presently imagine" (207). While Manne acknowledges we are far from reaching this point, she hopes for a "total divestment from beauty and diet culture" (207). Instead of using beauty as a way of reforming others' perception of fat (and other nonnormative) bodies, it need not figure in our strategies for facing fatphobia.

Having sketched Manne's alternative to body positivity and body neutrality, I now raise two critical questions about her view. First, is Manne fair to body positivity? Second, is body reflexivity truly different from body neutrality?

To begin, let's consider Manne's objections to body positivity. Manne singles out forms of body positivity that require us to have an unendingly positive attitude toward our bodies. By using phrases like "one monolithic attitude toward our own body or that of others" (202), "feeling uniformly positive about one's body" (202), or "the general mandate to be positive about our bodies" (204), she pinpoints a form of positivity that is tantamount to an imperative: Thou shalt always have a positive attitude toward your body! Framed in this way, body positivity is surely unrealistic. But has Manne painted body positivity in overly broad brushstrokes? Are there forms of body positivity deserving of consideration?

To achieve greater clarity on these questions, we should first distinguish having a positive body image from body positivity. In a recent article published in *Body Image*, Nichole Wood-Barcalow, Jessica Alleva, and Tracy Tylka disentangle positive body image and body positivity. Positive body image, as studied by psychologists, is taken to include appreciating one's body and caring for it. As Tylka and Wood-Barcalow indicate in an earlier article, positive body image is "a distinct construct from negative body image, *multifaceted* (with the facets including body appreciation, body acceptance and love, adaptive appearance investment, broadly conceptualizing beauty . . . filtering information in a body-protective manner)."[2] Thus, in the scientific literature on the topic, having a positive body image does not mean having a single attitude about one's body but rather encompasses a range of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It is also worth emphasizing that psychological studies of positive body image have suggested that embodying the associated attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors is within reach.[3] This implies that the motivation to embrace body neutrality as a more realistic alternative to body positivity is misguided and rests on a conflation between having a positive body image and "being body-positive" as touted on online platforms.[4] In contrast, the body positivity movement, as it is channeled in social media environments (usually under the hashtag #BoPo), often has toxic elements: "body positivity content typically does not normalize the experience of negative body-related thoughts and emotions. This narrowed scope aligns with toxic body positivity, or the belief that people should always think positively about their body, which is the body-specific form of the larger concept of toxic positivity."[5] On this point, Manne and body image researchers would agree: body positivity threatens to veer into toxic positivity.

With the distinction between positive body image and body positivity on the table, let's consider an instantiation of the ethos to promote positive body image without policing us. Consider the activist work done by Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott with The Body Positive, an organization they founded in 1996 and whose tenets are outlined by Sobczak in her 2014 book *Embody: Learning to love your unique body (and quiet that critical voice!)*. The five pillars of their work are the following. First, they call on us to reclaim health, in particular, by challenging fatphobic biases in medicine. Second, they encourage us and offer practices for practicing intuitive self-care—notably, the practice of intuitive eating. Third, they call on us to cultivate self-love: here, they rely on Rousseau's distinction between *amour propre*, which involves hierarchical thinking, and *amour de soi*, which entails pursuing one's well-being.[6] For Sobczak and Scott, self-love does not require a nonstop positive view of oneself (or one's body) but rather self-compassion and self-forgiveness.[7] Fourth, they ask that we redefine beauty in inclusive ways. Fifth, they sketch the need for community-building as part of resistance to toxic messages about our bodies. While Manne might disagree with the fourth pillar, I imagine that some of their other messages would resonate with her. And yet, if we stick to the letter of the organization's branding, Scott and Sobczak seem to embrace some version of body *positivity*.

Similarly, in my article "What Is Body Positivity? The Path from Shame to Pride" (2019), I describe body positivity as a rejection of *limiting* body shame and a transition to *proper* body pride. Using the work of Luna Dolezal, I define "limiting body shame" as shame that "can be restricting and must be overcome for life to have the possibility of dignity and fulfillment."[8] On the flip side, "proper body pride," as I argue, involves "overcoming unwarranted shame about one's own body and valuing all body types, especially stigmatized ones."[9] Thus, body positivity means transitioning from limiting body shame to proper body pride. I further explain that there are different avenues toward experiencing *proper* body pride: these may include re-envisioning human beauty or pursuing physical activities for the sake of the pleasure they afford.[10] Manne might object to the idea that we *ought* to feel proper pride about our bodies. But, as I see it, such pride is not a mandate. Rather, it is a description of the lives of those who labor, either individually or in concert with others, to overcome the shaming messages that prevent many from seeing the doctor when in need of medical attention, freely going about everyday activities, wearing what one wants, and so on. As I view things, body positivity functions as a regulative ideal. What would our lives look like if we faced fatphobia and other forms of body oppression? How can we embody this ideal and help others do the same?

Now, if body positivity is compatible with a range of affects regarding one's body, then Manne's criticisms seem uncharitable. But I may now be accused of describing

the movement in overly generous terms! Like any good philosophical debate, this discussion reveals the need to be clear about what we take body positivity to entail. The distinction between having a positive body image and the body positivity movement helps us circumscribe the target of Manne's criticisms: the mainstream messaging primarily operant on social media.

Let's now turn to Manne's contention that body reflexivity is superior to body neutrality. As mentioned, her criticisms of body neutrality are several: first, "a truly neutral attitude is hard to maintain" (204); second, body neutrality to some seems "tinged with negativity" (204); third, the position may "imply a blankness that is surely hard to conjure routinely about a subject matter as fraught as our own bodies" (204). Having voiced these concerns, Manne judges that "body neutrality seems at best a precarious retreat from judgment, not a stable resting place" (204). In her rebuttal to body neutrality, Manne urges us to "transcend the mode of assessment entirely" by giving up on evaluating our bodies positively, negatively, or neutrally (205). By appealing to the language of "working" for an individual, Manne harkens to the attitude, often associated with body neutrality, of valuing our bodies for what they can do rather than what they look like. For example, Anne Poirier, the counselor and intuitive eating specialist whose work has been hailed as a turning point in the move from body positivity to body neutrality, states, "Body neutrality prioritizes the body's function, and what the body can do, rather than its appearance."[11] Is this emphasis on functionality what Manne means by "working" for oneself? If this is the case, is body reflexivity distinct from neutrality?

To answer these questions, let's pause and study her language more closely. Manne draws a helpful comparison between body reflexivity and her husband's words, "I don't look at you with a critical eye" (205). To use this comparison as a guidepost, we will need to better understand the content of this uncritical gaze. Surely, it contains some sort of apprehension of Manne's body since this is a description of a way of looking at someone. Yet, how should we understand the *affective* character of this gaze (assuming there is one)? If it's not negative (i.e., "critical"), then is it neutral? Or is it even positive? Likewise, wouldn't one's own (uncritical) gaze toward one's body be neutral or positive? Does body reflexivity collapse into the two options Manne has rejected? At first blush, it does not appear we made any progress beyond body positivity or neutrality. But we have. And to see why, I propose taking a step back in time—to a period long before the body positivity vs. neutrality debate—and consider Marilyn Frye's notion of the *loving eye*.

Frye develops the concept of a loving eye in "In and Out of Harm's Way," an essay included in her 1983 classic, *The Politics of Reality*. There, Frye contrasts what she dubs the "arrogant eye" and the "loving eye." For the arrogant perceiver, "everything is either 'for me' or 'against me.' This is the kind of vision that interprets the rock one trips on as hostile, the bolt one cannot unloosen as stubborn, the woman who made meatloaf when he wanted spaghetti as 'bad' (though he didn't say what he wanted)."[12] By contrast, the loving perceiver is "one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination."[13] This is someone who "can see without the presupposition that the other poses a constant threat or that the other exists for the seer's service."[14] By analogy, a loving perception of someone's body would look at that body without invoking any evaluative categories (such as a "bad body" or a body that's "too fat," and so on). Likewise, it would not expect bodies to conform to one's aesthetic preferences. Perhaps this is how we ought to interpret the "uncritical" gaze Manne attributes to her husband.

Now consider Frye's ideas about the seer's agency and relations to the seen. The arrogant gaze lays the ground for *coercion*, while the loving gaze recognizes the *independence* of the seen. Seeing another as "not good enough" can lead to coercing that person to better suit one's needs. As Frye puts it, the arrogant perceiver "coerces the objects of his perception into satisfying the conditions his perception imposes."[15] In contrast, loving perception makes room for the other—for her to exercise her *autonomy*.

What does this appeal to Frye teach us about body reflexivity? I would argue that body reflexivity could be redescribed as a *loving perception of one's body*. It is not a neutral perception of oneself; it has an affective character. Yet, unlike Frye's loving perceiver, the subject and object of the gaze are the same. To adopt Frye's language, body reflexivity would mean that *one consults one's own will and interests*. This now allows us to connect to Manne's original formulation: "a body is not something good or bad or neutral for people generally, but rather something that may suit and work better or worse for its denizen—in other words, the person who inhabits it" (205). Frye's concept sheds light on the liberatory potential of Manne's view. Looking at oneself with a loving eye means divesting oneself from others' expectations. In fact, the notion of divestment leads us full circle back to Manne's statement: "body reflexivity is tied, as body positivity and body neutrality are not, to a political ethos—a radical politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be fat, or trans, or nonbinary, or queer, or disabled" (205). Whereas the label "body reflexivity" makes Manne's position look like just another one in the body acceptance potpourri, Frye's notion helps us better savor its distinctive political character. Body reflexivity is not merely about appreciating the body's functionality and, as such, it differs from everyday body neutrality. Moreover, by invoking love, I also wanted to add a—dare I say?—positive touch to Manne's "body reflexivity," which, without further commentary, may feel as bland as body neutrality.

Considering this discussion, we have reason to embrace Manne's alternative to body positivity and body neutrality. First, body reflexivity has the merit of avoiding the toxic and coercive elements of conventional body positivity messaging. That said, further research would be needed to situate Manne's proposal alongside more flexible forms of body positivity and to determine where the notion of having a positive body image fits within her framework. Second, body reflexivity has a political dimension that highlights the importance of autonomy in a way that "garden-variety" body positivity and neutrality do not. I hope these reflections will

spur a much-needed conversation about the limits of the body positivity vs. neutrality debate and will help us better theorize resistance to fatphobia and forms of oppression.

NOTES

1. Here, Manne refers to A.W. Eaton's "Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression" in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford University Press, 2016) and Cheryl Frazier's "Beauty Labor as a Tool to Resist Antifatness," *Hypatia* 38, no. 2 (2023): 231–50.
2. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, "What Is and What Is Not Positive Body Image?" 127.
3. Wood-Barcalow, Alleva, and Tylka, "Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New," 6.
4. Wood-Barcalow, Alleva, and Tylka 2024, "Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New," 7–8.
5. Wood-Barcalow, Alleava, and Tylka, "Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New," 6.
6. Sobczak, *Embody*, 133.
7. Sobczak, *Embody*, 125.
8. Dolezal, *The Body and Shame*, xv; quoted in Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? 118.
9. Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? 122.
10. Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? 123–26.
11. Anne Poirier is quoted in Charlotte Cowles's article, "Can 'Body Neutrality' Change the Way You Work Out? The Key to Staying Active Long Term May Be to Care Less about How You Look and More about How You Feel," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/well/move/body-neutrality-exercise.html.
12. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 67.
13. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 75.
14. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 74.
15. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 67.

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Hungry for More Intersectionality: A Review of Unshrinking *by Kate Manne*

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Overall, *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia* is a successful work of public philosophy. Manne's (2024) book provides a thorough introduction to fat studies. She engages with a wide range of literature, citing authors who have criticized fatphobia in medicine and epidemiology; to those who work from intersectional positions on race, class, sex/gender, and sexuality; to historical analyses and representations in media and popular culture. She enriches and extends discussions of fatphobia with her interlocutors as she reflects on her experiences of fatphobia throughout her life. Her analysis expertly weaves together the voices of many fat studies scholars and activists, making her conclusions and arguments plausible and intuitive.

As someone who is familiar with the field (and working on my dissertation in the area), I appreciate Manne's expansive survey on analyses of fatphobia across disciplines and contexts, and admire her ability to extract important ideas, concepts, and themes from various authors and place them in conversation with each other. *Unshrinking* is an accessible work in public-facing philosophy. Manne's purpose is to challenge the "everyday" fatphobia that affects us all. After she debunks fatphobic beliefs, challenges stereotypes, and explains how individuals in a fatphobic society respond to fatphobia, she presents a moral argument to convince her audience to reflect on how they perpetuate these attitudes in their own actions and discourses. Addressing fatphobia is a project of social justice, and no one deserves to be persecuted for their size. Whereas *Down Girl* offers an original argument with the goal of reconceptualizing "misogyny," *Unshrinking* recognizes that there is widespread resistance to the fat liberation movement, and it aims to challenge this resistance. Although I was (selfishly) looking forward to the new directions Manne would take fat studies, Manne clearly knows her audience. To ensure these arguments are received, Manne's decision to share personal experiences and present extensive research supporting her claims will better encourage sympathy from her readers.

In particular, I enjoyed her fourth chapter, "Demoralizing Fatness," which expertly debunks myths and narratives that condemn fat individuals for their size and consequently entail (either implicitly or explicitly) a duty to lose weight (or stay skinny). In this chapter, Manne argues, "Not being fat is simply not a moral obligation" (83). For one, science has not been able to tell us how to help people reliably lose weight or prevent people from gaining weight: "Weight is at best a proxy for the health concerns that we can, and should, care about" (88). Second, even if fatness is to some extent under people's control, being fat is not a "burden on the healthcare system" (90). Manne points out the malicious contradiction that fat people face—in our liberal society, individual choice for how one wants to live their best life only seems to apply to skinny (read: *healthy*) people.

Manne finishes the chapter by attempting to explain how disgust, a social behavior, might explain the moralization of fatness in our society. Drawing on psychological research, Manne argues that people frequently mistaken visceral disgust as moral disgust, leading them to harshly judge those that trigger a disgust reaction (95). And, because disgust is an adaptive response, it is socially contagious—people learn and internalize what should elicit a disgust reaction so it can be avoided (97). Manne concludes that this disgust "contagion" motivates people to stay or become skinny at the expense of their own health and, unfortunately, will make efforts to change fatphobic discourses evermore challenging (96, 98). It is an excellent chapter for instructional purposes that I will include in many of my course syllabi.

In *Unshrinking*, Manne discusses many ways that fatphobia intersects with other systems of oppression; however, there is an opportunity for future work to expand on this analysis. Firstly, I suggest that the connection between misogyny and fatphobia is stronger than Manne articulates. In *Unshrinking*, Manne argues fatphobia is used as an "ideological tool" (84) that reinforces other oppressive systems, such as "racism, sexism, misogyny, classism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, and transphobia" (13). She makes the connection between misogyny and fatphobia as follows: "Misogyny . . . finds in fatphobia a powerful and convenient ally: it constructs a ready-to-hand hierarchy among girls and women based on the infinitely gradable metric of body mass, usefully complicated by body shape, breast size, waist-to-hip ratio, and various markers of privilege" (117). In *Down Girl*, Manne argues that misogyny is the "enforcement branch" of the patriarchy, "which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing norms and expectations" of sexist, patriarchal ideologies.[1] The explanatory power of this account moves misogyny beyond that of an individual, women-hating "misogynist" to a structural account where violence is justified to ensure complicit performance of gender norms. So, according to Manne's account, women who do not demonstrate feminine body standards (of beauty and health) invite (additional) judgment, mistreatment, and violence for refusing to be complicit with patriarchal and/or sizeist norms. Fat is a marker of undesirability, a signifier of a woman's position in the social "hierarchy" that can be used to derogate her (102), thereby making her easier to control and overpower. These social pressures underscore the structural nature of fatphobia as it reinforces what Manne calls the "straitjacket of fatphobia": "as a powerful social marker . . . it signals that some bodies should be ignored, disregarded, and mistreated. It marks fat bodies as undeserving of care—and of education, employment, and other basic forms of freedom and opportunity" (17). Consequently, of course, women and girls internalize weight stigma and do everything they can to lose weight and/or avoid getting fat—if successful, they may have an opportunity to improve their rank in the hierarchy and gain (some) privilege. Manne illustrates this point with "sexual fatphobia"—the pressure she experienced as a woman who would "do almost anything to be smaller" out of fear of sexual rejection (101).

While it is important to capture how fatphobia can be weaponized to police gender norms, it seems incomplete to argue that the relationship between fatphobia and gender only functions in this direction. In my own work, I have been thinking about my phenomenological experience as a fat woman who must navigate spaces and environments that are inaccessible for fat and disabled bodies. Interestingly, I've come to similar conclusions about gender and fat that Harrison (2021) makes about the relationship between race and fat. Harrison argues that anti-fatness (fatphobia) *is* anti-Blackness: anti-fatness and anti-Blackness are ideologies that "do not and cannot exist independent of one another."[2] Analogously, I think it is worth exploring how fatphobia shapes and is shaped by (cishetero)sexism. As a social construct, Butler theorized how gender is defined and reified through successful gender performance: "our behaviors that are gendered are not innate to us. We learn them, and then we learn to perform them. And this performance is policed and maintained by cisheteronormativity, or the idea that everyone already is—and therefore all things must be seen as—cisgender and heterosexual."[3] Fat prevents individuals from intelligibly performing socially defined gendered norms of the ideal femme body; therefore, gender becomes unintelligible when one cannot (or will not) conform to the body standards expected of a beautiful, curvy-in-all-the-right-places, cishet, white, nondisabled woman. How are women and girls supposed to be "small, meek, and quiet" (3), while "diminish[ing] ourselves dutifully" (10) if our fat (intersectional) bodies are unruly and unable to conform to feminine norms? Fat does not simply work as a tool for gender oppression, but it seems that gender also constructs what counts as fat. As Manne clearly demonstrates through the narratives of her experiences and others in *Unshrinking*, women and girls do not need to be fat to be called fat, treated as fat, or subjected to violence as justified by their embodiment. Even when one considers beauty norms as divorced from weight or size, Manne provides examples that seem to suggest *anti-fatness co-constitutes cisheterosexism*.[4] If "oppression is always already intersectional,"[5] then fat is presumably more than an "ideological tool" for intersectional oppression.[6]

My second suggestion for expanding intersectional analyses of fatphobia in *Unshrinking* is to consider intersections with disability theory. *Unshrinking* contains rich discussions of fat as it intersects with race, gender, sexuality, and even class; regrettably however, disability is neglected. Manne discusses Quetelet, an early statistician and eugenicist, as responsible for inspiring the invention of BMI, which became the standard for measuring and classifying certain bodies as "obese" (in particular, it became a racial marker and tool for anti-Black discrimination) (87–88). Notably, Davis (2021) argues that Quetelet's philosophy was instrumental in the construction of the "norm," thereby weaponizing early eugenics movements with the ability to identify, marginalize, pathologize, cure, and/or eliminate bodies that deviate from the "normal" (and "ideal") human form. In other words, the construction of the norm established what physical (and psychological) traits constituted "impairments" that needed to be ameliorated (i.e., "cured"[7]) from the population. The shared history of the creation of the norm to identify weight deviations and other physical and psychological impairments reveals biopolitical

intersections between fatphobia and ableism. Critically, eugenics programs strove to eliminate many different "social ills" from the population: immigrants, the physically disabled, "the feebleminded, the mentally deficient . . . paupers, criminals, and the sexually promiscuous,"[8] as well as Indigenous peoples, were all targets of eugenics. It is not a coincidence that the eugenics movement aimed to remove disability, gender, and racial diversity from contemporary society. The epistemic authority of science and medicine in constructing the concept of the norm (i.e., power-knowledge) "created a dominant idea of what the body should be," which continues to permeate discourses about non-ideal body-minds in contemporary society.[9] Systems of oppression, as systems of power-knowledge, reinforce each other in the biopolitical control of deviant bodies and the desire to *norm* the population.

The need to include a disability lens in *Unshrinking* is evident when Manne is theorizing about misogyny. After explaining how fatphobia constructs a "hierarchy among women and girls" based on their body size and shape, Manne states, "Some fat activists and advocates say that fatphobia seeks to eliminate fat people: that the prevailing attitude toward fat bodies is essentially genocidal. I'm not denying that this can be the case, but I'm not convinced that it always is. If we [fat people] didn't exist, there would be significantly fewer people for thinner folks to feel superior to" (117). Although Manne alludes to this shared historical connection between BMI and eugenics (87), I think the absence of a disability lens to contextualize the genocide of fat bodies leads to mistaken conclusions about fatphobia and its intersection with misogyny. Eugenic logic is simultaneously concerned with improving the overall fitness of the population and eliminating certain undesirable traits from a population (often by eliminating the individual with the trait so they cannot pass it on to future generations).[10] Even if eugenic programs, practices, and policies successfully eliminated certain kinds of people from the population, the statistical distribution of traits simply shifts the norm. Therefore, there will always be a deviant expression of a trait as the norm continues to shift. We can imagine a bell curve representing the BMI of all people in a population. Even if we were successful in losing weight across the population, the bell curve would shift, but in doing so it would define a new ideal weight (or weight distribution) that would be as difficult for some bodies to attain.[11] This eugenic logic can explain how the socially "ideal" body has become harder to attain—we have resorted to drastic, unnatural, and expensive medical interventions to achieve a thin, yet curvy-in-all-the-right-places body. Even if there are "fewer people for thinner folks to feel superior to" (117), norming a population will inevitably lead to the creation of a new norm and, thus, a new ideal. As Mollow concludes, "the ideal of corporeal agency is laden with ableist implications . . . a root cause of disabled people's oppression is the threat that we are seen as posing to cultural fantasies of bodily control . . . the ways that *all* subjects fail to embody ableist ideologies of corporeal control" should be taken more seriously in fat studies.[12]

Manne's narrative through *Unshrinking* parallels disability analyses against medical narratives that construct disability as deviance from a "normal" embodiment. Like social and political models of disability, fat scholars criticize the medicalization and pathologization of fat as an individual problem that ought to be cured; instead, fatphobic discourses, discrimination, and structural marginalization should be ameliorated. A social approach to fat, like disability, necessarily seeks to challenge cultural discourses and beliefs that subject fat/disabled bodies to marginalization, violence, and harms of society, while also taking into consideration nuances of diverse fat embodiment (e.g., intersectional experiences and different levels of medical intervention wanted/required). Authors like Herndon (2002), Mollow (2015), and Shalk and Kim (2020) argue that fat and disability theory complement and extend theorizing on fat and disabled bodies. For example, bringing a disability lens could strengthen Manne's conclusions about fat activism and identity politics. Significant work has been done to theorize inclusive social imaginaries that emphasize collective action and allyship from a diverse, intersectional coalition in disability theory. I have only been able to heal my relationship with my body through the power of belonging to a collective, being supported from my fat disability community. An intersectional analysis of fat that discusses every axis other than disability is not truly intersectional. As Harrison argues, "'Intersect' implies that they exist on their own and meet at a point," whereas a truly intersectional analysis explores how systems of oppression reinforce each other.[13] Disability theory would bring additional nuance to Manne's argument.

After *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* and *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women*, I expected Manne to deliver a clearly and accessibly written critique of the patriarchy with interwoven narratives about contemporary and relevant examples to make her argument. While Manne's *Unshrinking* undoubtedly met these expectations, the autoethnographical nature of the book was completely unexpected. Even though I was aware Manne was using philosophy to unpack her relationship with her body (I attended some early talks Manne gave on the book and have been following her on X/Twitter for the past five years), I was surprised by her vulnerability and openness to share some of the experiences she described in *Unshrinking*. Sharing her fraught journey to heal her internalized fatphobia, Manne invites her reader to join her journey by reflecting and challenging their own fatphobic attitudes and biases.

While some philosophers may criticize this book for being too personal and partial (some may even go as far to say this is not "philosophy"),[14] I genuinely appreciate Manne's candor. Like Manne, I have been using my dissertation to understand my own experiences of fatphobia, accept my body, and dismantle my internalized fatphobia. Manne's brave vulnerability (in following with the fat authors she cites, like Harrison, Gordon, Strings, Taylor, and more) gives me the courage to be personal and intimate in my own work, despite the attitudes and norms of the discipline. Of course, this is not to say that published philosophy, primarily in the feminist tradition, has not been personal. I think the personal experiences described in the canon feminist papers is what makes them continually relevant (for instance, Brison's [1993] paper philosophizing about

her sexual assault). However, as Manne articulates in *Unshrinking*, philosophy (and academia more generally) communicates "that not only are fat bodies a moral and sexual problem; they are an intellectual problem too" (121). Even as a feminist, Manne and others have highlighted how this attitude seeps into feminist philosophy.[15] Occupying a fat body can result in an epistemic injustice—your credibility as a knower of your own experience and expertise are dismissed, challenged, ignored. *Unshrinking* has given me a new confidence in my philosophical projects on fat. Speaking from my own experience, I understand the energy it takes to philosophize about issues that are personal.[16] So I thank Manne for sharing her journey and for amplifying the voices of fat scholars and activists who, in virtue of their size and intersections, might not receive the attention or acclaim they deserve.

NOTES

1. Manne, *Down Girl*, 78.
2. Harrison, *Belly of the Beast*, in Sperry, "Anti-Blackness as Anti-Fatness: An Interview with Da'Shaun L. Harrison."
3. Harrison, *Belly of the Beast*, 86.
4. To draw another comparison, Manne discusses String's (2019) account of how BMI established race as an unhealthy ideal. Similarly, however, the creation of body mass index (BMI) as a tool to measure one's fatness historically excluded non-men and has been criticized as sexist and transphobic (Fuller, "Using BMI to Measure Your Health Is Nonsense. Here's Why"; Bright, "Critiquing and Resisting the Medical Construction of Sexist Bodily Norms").
5. Rodier, "Rethinking Fat Studies," 15.
6. For example, Harrison argues "fatness functions as a gender of its own. Fatness fails, and therefore disrupts, the foundation on which gender is built" (102). This argument sketches fat as more than a tool for gendered violence but as co-constituting fatphobia and gender oppression.

   Furthermore, it occurred to me that Manne's analysis would have benefitted from a Foucauldian framework. Manne's analysis does suggest biopower and governmentality; for instance, the "straitjacket of fatphobia" reveals how fatphobic discourses are internalized and used to govern our relationships with our body, food, exercise, etc., and, of course, medicine's influence of healthism, pathologization, and individual responsibility on the discipline of fat bodies. Restructuring the analysis through this lens may help explain the deeply intersectional relationship between fat, gender, race, and class.
7. The social construction of disability as physical or psychological impairments "fram[e] disability as a medical problem lodged in individual body-minds, which need to be treated or cured" (Clare, Brilliant Imperfection, 8).
8. Wilson and St. Pierre, "Disability and Eugenics," 98–99.
9. Davis, "Disability, Normality, and Power," 3.
10. Davis, "Disability, Normality, and Power"; Wilson and St. Pierre, "Disability and Eugenics."
11. It is also important to recognize that eugenic programs and policies are not always effective in removing the targeted trait from the population. Elsewhere, I am arguing that, in the case of fat, the drastic measures to eliminate fat from the population (e.g., bariatric surgery, semaglutides, restrictive dieting, overexercising, etc.) which to weight cycling is a form of eugenics. These measures, coupled with internalizing fatphobia, is worse for one's health than staying fat and leads to higher morbidity and mortality. Further, I think there are interesting analogies that can be drawn between the moral panic instigated by the historical eugenics movement and the moral panic driving the discourse of the "obesity epidemic."
12. Mollow, "Disability Studies Gets Fat," 211, emphasis in original.
13. Sperry, "Anti-Blackness as Anti-Fatness."
14. Manne anticipates this response in her book when she describes not being recognized as a philosopher (*Unshrinking*, 119). In recent years, some philosophers have criticized the discipline for its lack of diversity. Jones ("Philosophy for Everyone") argues that the discipline's resistance to diversify can be (at least partly) attributed to the norm of practice policing which projects count as "real" philosophy. Regrettably, feminist philosophy (even without the use of anecdotal experiences to support an argument) still fights for legitimacy in many institutions and departments.
15. Rodier, "Rethinking Fat Studies"; Mollow, "Disability Studies Gets Fat."
16. I cannot fathom the anxiety that comes with publishing a book on fatphobia for a general audience who is likely not as sympathetic to or knowledgeable about this topic, and inviting backlash that could be worse than *Down Girl* (see *Unshrinking*; Manne 2024, 4).

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The Fallacies and Figleaves of Fatphobia: Expanding on Arguments in Manne's Unshrinking

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Many years ago, I attended an academic conference and found myself having a conversation with one of the brightest MA students I have ever met. Even though he was already presenting alongside tenured faculty at a professional conference, he expressed nervousness about his future in academia. Upon further discussion, it was revealed he was nervous that no one would ever take him seriously as a fat man. I assured him he was clearly very smart, confident, and hard-working, as well as doing all the right things. He sighed, signifying the underlying reality, that no matter how much he would prove himself intellectually, fat bias was going to make success harder to achieve. It was not impossible, of course, but being fat meant the relevant bias would be a hurdle, especially because most of the bias is implicit, hidden from those who were still acting upon it. "I have never been able to lose weight, so this is how it is going to be."

This seemed so unfair and highly unreasonable. But as a mid-fat woman myself, I understood what he meant.

In this critical response to Kate Manne's 2024 book *Unshrinking*, I will focus on issues raised in the chapter "Small Wonder." In this chapter, Manne explores fat stigma in academia, primarily in philosophy. Her argument focuses on the history and practices of fatphobia in philosophical works, from Plato and Aristotle to contemporary philosophical work, adding to her overall moral argument throughout the book: fatphobic beliefs and their accompanying behaviors violate dignity of persons and is morally bad. I wish to further her arguments here in a different direction. I argue that not only does fat stigma violate dignity, but fatphobic beliefs and their accompanying actions also perpetuate bad reasoning, bad rhetoric, and thought clichés, the very things that should be anathema to our profession. If you are not persuaded by Manne's moral arguments and find yourself thinking arguments about epistemic injustice are nothing but "liberal bunk," this addition to Manne's thesis might give you pause. By pointing out the bad reasoning endemic to fatphobia, I show it to be a threat to the health of one's critical thinking skills. *And aren't you worried about your health*?

First, I briefly revisit two of Manne's arguments in "Small Wonder," while fortifying them with the work of Aubrey Gordon.[1] Next, I connect the underlying assumptions made in fatphobic thinking and action to informal fallacies. Lastly, I show how fatphobic rhetoric is also connected to what Jennifer Saul has dubbed figleaves. By presenting both the fallacies and figleaves about health and weight, I show that fatphobic thought and action is not just unethical, but a detriment to the philosophical tradition. The inability to think critically about our beliefs and hiding bad reasoning under figleaves undermines the practice of doing philosophy well.

1. SUMMARIZING "SMALL WONDER"

In this chapter, Manne focuses on the problem of fatphobia in academia. She writes that this chapter is "an examination of fatphobia" in her own field "which . . . can serve as a lens, indeed, a magnifying glass, for something larger: the way we think the minds housed in fatter bodies are less than, even stupid" (121) She speaks to how, in academia, fat bodies are seen as a "sign of intellectual failure" (121). She covers how fat bodies are used as "props" in thought experiments in ethics courses, such as the variation of the Trolly Scenario "Fat Man,"[2] the misreading of Plato and Aristotle on gluttony, the intersection of fatness and the feminine as being categorized as anti-rational, and how issues in epistemic injustice and entitlement play a role in fatphobia.

All of these contribute to her argument that fatphobic behavior is morally bad. The explicit expression of the bias is best shown in Manne's example of the now-deleted Tweet from a psychology professor, which reads, "Dear PhD applicants, if you don't have the will power to stop eating carbs, you won't have the will power to do your dissertation. #truth" (133).[3] He did apologize later, saying it did not represent his university or his own PhD applicant selection criterion. But he's wrong about that: it clearly does represent the general biased views held in academic departments and circles about the nature of fat, health, willpower, and intellectual abilities of students (and future possible faculty). This bias contributes to the academic culture which denies fat subjects' basic dignity, Manne argues, in that it leads to seeing fat bodies as "good evidence that" their "mind is lacking" (140). Instead of seeing fat bodies as individual persons, they are treated as "pitiable," "unhealthy," or as less rational/more physical, lacking in willpower, and less disciplined than thin bodies (or the minds within thin bodies).

I further this argument by asking which party in this academic milieu is being more rational? I argue here that holding fatphobic beliefs and acting upon them is a sign of poor critical thinking and arises when little to no reflective work is being done. In this next section, with the help of Manne and Aubrey Gordon, I identify the most prevalent informal fallacies underlying fatphobic rhetoric, often spoken by those who consider themselves "more rational."

2. THE FALLACIES OF FATPHOBIA

Manne writes that fat persons are perceived as lacking willpower and discipline (129–33, 175–78). She shares not only the Tweet mentioned earlier, but also shares examples of someone choosing cake over a peach from Nagel's paper "Free Will" and Pinker's example of an "irrational doofus who prefers the 'small pleasure' of having lasagna now-rather than steamed vegetables" (132)[4] The topic of fat persons lacking various forms of self-control is covered in Gordon's book *You Just Need to Lose Weight and 19 Other Myths about Fat People*. Chapter 9 argues against the commonly held belief that "fat people are emotionally damaged and cope by eating their feelings."[5] The beliefs that follow from these assumptions are that thin persons are in control of their willpower, as well as in control of their emotions, or at least in more control than fat persons. Fat persons generally are said to be lacking in discipline

too. Gordon writes, "frameworks around 'emotional eating' ignore the fact that even in the absence of major trauma or emotional challenges, fat people still exist. . . . While all the studies cited in this chapter offer a scientific study of correlation, it is only that: a correlation."[6] Gordon cites many peer-reviewed scientific sources throughout her work to show this.[7] Fat persons eat for many reasons, as does any person: holidays, celebrations, taste, experiences, or even straight-up hunger. There is no scientifically verified connection made between all fat bodies and lack of willpower over food or emotional eating. Notice that I state that it is not for all fat bodies; we can postulate that some fat bodies may have this connection. But to generalize all fat bodies would be rather hasty.

We have come to the first of our handful of fatphobic fallacies: confusing correlation with causation. This informal fallacy occurs when one concludes based solely on the order of events, rather than looking to the myriad other factors that ought to be considered for accuracy and clarity. We often overlook those other factors as they might rule out the connection we desire to make.[8] In this case, we miss many more important factors in what makes certain bodies fat. Yes, caloric intake can account for some cases of weight gain, but this factor alone is not the only explanation of A (abundance of calories) causing B (a fat body), or that the lack of willpower leads to being fat. With a little responsible research and critical thinking, it is apparent that other features are the main factors in the creation of various body sizes: genes, hormones, environment. And these factors are not chosen nor "corrected" by willpower or discipline. And yes, let us not forget that to judge all fat bodies as being fat for the same reason would also qualify as a hasty generalization, as hinted at in the previous paragraph. To judge one or two fat persons as having quality X, and to extrapolate all fat persons have quality X, especially when that quality is often not fully understood by the person making the judgment, that person risks making a faulty representation of the whole class.

Another issue Manne addresses is the problem of "lose weight and look smarter" (134). There is a prevalence of the connection between being thin and being perceived as smart, and points to how one is encouraged to lose weight to succeed in academics. This issue can be seen in the opening story about the MA student. This can also be seen in the hypothetical-fat-graduate-student-chiding Tweet. Not only is one perceived as lacking willpower and discipline if they are fat, but it is also assumed one lacks intelligence. Manne links this fatphobic assumption to the negative bias against feminine bodies (read as soft and weak). She writes, "fatness and femininity remain a liability . . . shrink or be belittled" (134–35). But the idea that one's body alone can tell us about their intellect is absurd. "There's nothing inevitable about the idea that the brightest minds tend to be housed in thin bodies" (137–38). Manne tells of a snide remark at the girth of David Hume in a textbook, which commented that "the lightness and quickness of his mind was entirely hidden by the lumpishness of his appearance" (123).[9]

If a person believes the fat content of bodies has a connection to their critical thinking capacities, whose critical thinking is deficient? There is no causal link between the size of a body and the critical thinking skills housed in those bodies.

At this time, I would like to address a possible retort: "Well, if fat academic hopefuls don't like it, they can just lose weight."[10]

"Just losing weight" to be treated with dignity is clearly not a reply to Manne's moral argument. Persons deserve to be treated as persons at any weight. The categorical imperative does not just apply to those under a size 10. But also, losing a considerable amount of weight is not a real possibility for most fat persons. Gordon explains why this response is clearly an uninformed opinion about fat bodies and not based in an empirically informed reality. She writes, "research indicates that our endocrine systems, not our willpower, are significant mechanisms that determine, in part, whether we feel the drive to eat . . . our body weights are 'tightly regulated by hormonal, metabolic, and neural factors,' factors that 'appear to depend on an individual's highest sustained body weight.'"[11] Again, weight loss is not achieved through willpower alone (or at all) or the calories in, calories out mantra.[12] The human body is a complex open system with many parts working together. "If you don't like it, lose weight" is akin to telling a person that if they want to have more time, they should stop sleeping (175).

Needing sleep to function is not a failure of the intellect; it is a biological function. Needing lasagna to nourish yourself is not a sign of failure of the intellect; it is a sign of being biologically alive. Some bodies need more sleep, some less. Some bodies need more food, some need less. Diets not working is not a sign of intellectual failure, but a sign that diets don't work for most persons in the long run. This is an empirical fact. To argue that a fat body is the sign of an intellectual failure is a category error, especially if one is dualist, an issue Manne also addresses.

To see a fat body and to "know" it to be damaged, irrational, unhealthy is a sign of another fallacy: false authority. In this fallacy, we see non-experts acting as those with actual expertise, namely, experts on research in fat, genetics, diet, nutrition, and socio-economic factors that impact the body, when they clearly are lacking such expertise.[13] If a person assumes to understand complex biological functions of a person they do not intimately know, on top of claiming to know that person's complex medical history, to use that assumed "knowledge" make sweeping medical and/or value judgments or prescriptions smacks of the false authority fallacy. Barking at strangers that "it's just calories in, calories out" and position it is "just science" suggests this fallacy as well. Are you a specialist in metabolic functions in the human body and know intimate details about the person's body in question? If so, perhaps you might be reasonably able to assert something about how calories work in that body or similar ones. But most persons proclaiming this authority are not working in labs with specialists but picking up fruits out of grocery carts and saying "this is high in calories" to fat persons.[14] Philosophers are experts in many things, but metabolic functions, hormones, digestion, genetics, and fat, are not usually our specialty. And continuing to appeal to outdated

science to make these proclamations only make us even worse authorities, as we are appealing to other false authorities in our claims.[15]

"Can't we even be concerned about the health of others?! It is like we can't say anything anymore!" some might cry out. Well, this figleaf is for you.

3. THE FIGLEAVES OF FATPHOBIA

If we are a person committed to the moral arguments Manne has made in her book, we might wonder if anything is wrong, then, for caring about another person's health. Sounds like the right thing to do, right?

One must revisit the fallacy of false authority once more, as well as confusing correlation with causation, and perhaps even false or oversimplified cause. Are you an authority on the subject's health you are concerned for? Also, are you sure of the causal chain linking that subject's health to their weight? Chances are they are not connected.[16] And shifting the focus to worrying about the health of a subject as a moral concern is missing the point (*ignorato elenchi*) of Manne's argument. Moral consideration is given regardless of the health of the person. Full stop. But if one still believes that one should be worried about a fat person's health as a moral imperative, I argue that this might be a motivated missing the point in the form of what I call a fatphobic figleaf. I briefly reference Gordon's writing on "concern trolling" for fat people's health and then move on to apply Jennifer Saul's concept of racial figleaves to the issue of fatphobia.

In part two of Gordon's book *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, she tackles the various forms of "concern" for fat persons' health: that obesity causes death, that the BMI is an objective measure of health, doctors are unbiased in their evaluations of fat bodies, and fat people must be damaged.[17] These are all myths she dispels. But the overall message is clear: there is very little legitimate concern for fat persons' health behind all these beliefs. She writes that "concern trolling is the Trojan horse of anti-fatness."[18] If the health of fat people were truly the issue, focus would shift on fighting fat stigma in healthcare so that health concerns of fat persons were not simply dismissed by telling a fat patient "you just need to lose weight."[19] If one was truly committed to epistemic justice for fat bodies, you would listen to fat people when they shared stories of abuse and cruelty towards them instead of saying, "I am sure they meant well when they told you to lose weight," or "How could he have raped you? Fat women don't get raped."[20] I would add that these "concern for your health" statements are now so prevalent that they qualify as thought clichés, but a very pernicious form of a thought cliché that is a figleaf for fatphobia.

Jennifer Saul writes about what she calls "racial figleaves" in Chapter 3 of her 2024 book, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves: How Manipulative Language Spreads Racism and Falsehood*. She writes that racial figleaves are "an utterance that provides cover for another utterance that—without the figleaf—would be recognized as racist."[21] The most obvious examples would be "I'm not racist but . . ." or "Some of my best friends are black." She distinguishes two types of figleaves: synchronic, which happens at the same time as the utterance, and diachronic, which appears as a means of defending a previous utterance. Referencing the previous example of the fatphobic tweet, the diachronic figleaf takes the form of "that doesn't represent me."[22]

Saul writes that racist figleaves only convince those who believe racism can only be explicit and violent, and it is that sort of audience racist figleaves can convince that racist content is not actually racist. She writes for those convinced by figleaves that "only the most blatant, obvious, and monstrous" are racist, while those who understand the varieties of racism in everyday life will be unconvinced. But those figleaves are not for those who understand racism more complexly, but for those who think racism is only one sort of extreme phenomenon. The rest of us find racist figleaves a dangerous rhetorical tool and evidence of racism.

We can apply this analysis to statements like "What about your health?" Much like those familiar with the racism behind, "I'm not racist but racist statement X," we can also hear that mirrored in "I'm not fatphobic but fat people just need to lose weight" or "I'm not anti-fat, but I'm just worried about your health." Fatphobic figleaves like this are a red herring to distract from fatphobia to hide it from others in earshot, and perhaps, also from the speaker themselves. Those who are knowledgeable about the pervasiveness of fatphobia are not fooled. But fatphobic figleaves are for those who imagine fatphobia to only be blatant, violent, or explicit, not language of care and concern. And sadly, fatphobic figleaves make noticing one's own expressions of fatphobic rhetoric hard to hear, even coming from one's own mouth.

Saul says the use of figleaves is dangerous as it unconsciously coerces "a cooperative conversational participant" into "accepting these claims."[23] If no one speaks up, "the norms for that context shift so that racist speech becomes permissible."[24] And often, people notice blatant racism, but when delivered by a figleaf, it enters barely noticed by most, becomes normalized, and over time, more extreme.[25]

One way to combat these figleaves is to question the package that ideas are being delivered to you in via language. "I'm just worried about your health": let us break this thought cliché figleaf. Ask "Are you concerned about any other person's health in this room? Why not?" or "Person X rode a motorcycle to this event, so are you equally worried about their health?" or "Does a person's health matter morally to you? If so, why?" or "What do you know about that person's health apart from their appearance?"

4. CONCLUSION

In the third episode of season sixteen of *The Simpsons*, Lisa Simpson becomes convinced she is fat and restricts her eating and begins exercising constantly while also recognizing that this behavior is fatphobic and antifeminist. At the end of the episode, Lisa understands the difficulty of her position: to be stuck worrying about her weight while also understanding how unreasonable diet culture and

fatphobia is. Homer pleads with his daughter to wrap up the episode with a happy moral lesson.

> Homer: And Lisa, what have you learned?
>
> Lisa: Nothing. Like many women, I still have an unhealthy obsession with my weight.
>
> Homer: But talking about the problem is the first step towards a solution, right?
>
> Lisa: I guess. But there's a long way to go.[26]

This episode aired in 2004. Since then, we have come a long way thanks to the effort of fat rights activists questioning fatphobia and fat discrimination in healthcare, the workplace, and in everyday life. And we can do better in academics when we think harder about our default settings and suppositions by critically analyzing our thoughts and actions to see how rational they are and how well-informed they are. The work of philosophers like Manne paves the way for this practice.

Many of us philosophers can do better. We have been trained to do better. Questioning fatphobia is required not just morally but intellectually. This is what rigorous philosophical inquiry looks like, and we should aim for nothing less.

NOTES

1. Manne does use Gordon's work in her book, but I will be highlighting sections for this project's sake.
2. In my ethics courses, I update this to "The Rock" Trolley Problem. I cannot help but add here that according to the highly problematic BMI, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and other wrestlers like "Stone Cold" Steve Austin are categorized as obese. See https://www.menshealth.com/weight-loss/a19537796/the-problem-with-bmi/.
3. *You know it must be true when it's #truth*.
4. *Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels, eh, Pinker?*
5. Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 73–81.
6. Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 77.
7. One of the most enjoyable to read is Giles Yeo's book, *Gene Eating: The Science of Obesity and the Truth About Dieting*.
8. A fallacy that plagues many academic disciplines, sadly, as we really desire that our connections are simple and straightforward.
9. *His brilliant mind was hidden? Where?* Many persons, including myself, find his brilliance everywhere. Hume is better described as one of the most brilliant philosophers of all time, a value judgment I agree with.
10. I would like to say that this retort is a case of me committing the strawman fallacy of the opponent, but as many fat persons can attest to, this is a common reply to fat persons asking for equal and fair consideration or treatment. Gordon writes that saying life will just be easier if you get thin is like saying life would be easier for you if you get straight, or act whiter, or conform to gender norms. Gordon, *What We Don't Talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 81. For an example of the issue of "sounding white" and the bias against "sounding black," see Martin Abel and Rulof Berger, "Unpacking Name-Based Race Discrimination," *IZA Discussion Paper* No. 16254, https://ssrn.com/abstract=4490163.
11. Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 15.
12. See Yeo's 2021 Royal Institution lecture "How We Got the Science of Weight Loss Wrong" for more information, along with his other publications. And, yes, even doctors can be ill-informed about the nature of calories, diet, exercise, and weight, as they might not specialize in these systems.
13. This is also related to the problem of epistemic entitlement. Manne address this issue in *Unshrinking* and *Entitled* (2020).
14. Again, I'd like to say I was committing the strawman fallacy, but I am not. See Gordon, *What We Don't Talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 71–73.
15. Yes, our focus on calories is antiquated science in health and weight. See Yeo, but also, Stacey, "This Doctor Pioneered Counting Calories a Century Ago, and We're Still Dealing with the Consequences."
16. Do not take this to mean there are no unhealthy states connected to weight of both higher and lower values, but that fat does not entail unhealthy absolutely as well as thin entails healthy. Do not be so either/or about bodies and their health.
17. I referenced this argument earlier in this work.
18. Gordon, *What We Don't talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 78.
19. For a heartbreaking examples of how fatphobic practices in medicine are harmful, see Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 63–70.
20. See Gordon, *What We Don't Talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 99–107 for more on the pervasive problem of believing fat bodies as victims of sexual assault.
21. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 71.
22. Then who does it represent, I wonder. . . . I do acknowledge that it might be up for debate whether certain apologies can count as a form of a diachronic figleaf.
23. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 85.
24. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 85.
25. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 87.
26. John Vitti, writer, *The Simpsons*, Season 16, Episode 3, "Sleeping with the Enemy," November 21, 2004.

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The Future of Facing Fatphobia

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As a longtime fan of Kate Manne's work, I will admit (perhaps embarrassingly) that my copy of *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia* has come to resemble a kindergartener's art project. It is doused with colorful sticky notes, highlighted passages, and marginalia, much of which involves exclamations of relief. This relief is not only because Manne beautifully brings together fat scholars and activists into conversation with philosophy, but also because she does so with clear love and care. As I thumbed back through these notes some months after my initial read, I was particularly struck by a comment Manne makes in the introduction of her book. She writes,

> I believe that when it comes to fatphobia, the solution is not to improve our self-image or love our bodies better. It is nothing less than to *remake the world* to properly fit fat bodies, and to effect the socially transformative recognition that there is truly nothing wrong with us. (9)

This quote is particularly telling, and subtly captures many of the strengths of Manne's project that I wish to focus on in this paper.

1. FAT COMMUNITIES AS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCERS

Manne follows this passage with a call to action, a rallying cry to "resist the fatphobia that has oppressed, controlled, and constrained us, for the sake of ourselves and—most importantly—still larger people" (9). I have been fat my entire life, but have existed at various points on the so-called "Fat Spectrum," popularized and expanded on by Ash Nischuk (2016). I currently vacillate between superfat and infinifat, meaning I fall on the furthest end of this spectrum—a fact which heavily influences both how I navigate my daily life and my experiences with fatphobia. I mention this because, as someone who exists in the far-regions of fatness, I was taken aback by (and tremendously grateful for) Manne's repeated acknowledgements of the vastness of fat embodiment and experience. *Unshrinking* shines in part because Manne is able to offer an incredibly rich, vulnerable look into her own life and experiences with anti-fatness, but also because she recognizes that *her* fat experience is not *the* fat experience (and, in fact, that *there is no singular* "fat experience").

Manne's comments that we must resist fatphobia, especially for the sake of those who are most harmed by it, speak to her clear commitment to do work with and for the fat community. In the excerpt from her introduction, it is not accidental that Manne proclaims that "there is truly nothing wrong with **us**" (9, emphasis added). *Unshrinking* puts into action Charlotte Cooper's commitment (one which I share) that "fat people should be recognized as important knowledge producers [about fatness, and that] academics and policy-makers of all sizes should support fat people in claiming space to produce that knowledge."[1] Given the limitations of Manne's own identities, and the wide variety of experiences one might have with fatphobia depending on their place on the fat spectrum and other identities that may render them more likely to be harmed by anti-fat oppression, Manne's book deserves praise for the level of care she put into advocating for the most marginalized in our fat communities.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY REFLEXIVITY

The most striking takeaway from *Unshrinking*, for me, was Manne's notion of "body reflexivity." An alternative mindset from body positivity or body neutrality, body reflexivity is a radical adjustment of our relationships to our own bodies—an affirmation that our bodies are our own, and that we exist for "ourselves, and no one else" (196). In order to push back at the cultural imperatives forced upon us by anti-fatness and diet culture, body reflexivity asks us to instead understand our bodies as existing for us, on our own terms. Refreshingly, body reflexivity "does not prescribe any particular evaluative stance towards one's form," instead allowing us the freedom to exist in our bodies and to have autonomy over them. With body reflexivity we must embrace a "radical politics of autonomy" (205) that we extend to ourselves and others, stepping back from a culture that has taught us to investigate and scrutinize others (whether negatively *or* positively). If my body is my own, so too is your body your own.

This notion of body reflexivity is needed as much now as it has ever been, especially as fat people are subject to heightened scrutiny in the face of a new wave of weight-loss drugs like Ozempic, which have resulted in increased body surveillance and pressures to lose weight. With a new possibility for weight loss, fat people are now put in even more of a bind to perform within others' expectations—whether while fat or while intentionally pursuing weight loss.

A recent Instagram post by singer Lizzo reveals this, as a video of her highlighting different styles of workout clothing for her line, Yitty, was barraged by comments speculating about the means of her weight loss. While Lizzo has spoken some, more vaguely, about focusing on her health during a brief hiatus from making music, she has not (to my knowledge) explicitly mentioned intentionally losing weight. "Ozempic queeeen," one user wrote, while another commented, "Why is it anytime someone loses weight yall say they're taking weight loss medicine and/or surgery?! . . . Ppl still do it the old fashioned way, ya know."[2] Although many messages seem both supportive of Lizzo's assumed weight loss *and* of her former, larger body, they have in common that they assume some kind of authority to speculate on another person's body—one which body reflexivity says we do not have. I think this notion of body reflexivity plays an important role in the future of fatness, but that it must be approached with great care and nuance if it is to be successful in helping address fatphobia.

3. THE WEIGHT OF OUR WORDS

As we try to build a world in which our bodies are truly our own, how we speak about ourselves (and one another) is crucial. As I survey the literature on fatness, I am

routinely struck by how much of it focuses on fatphobia—on understanding and **only** discussing fat people in conversations about how we are oppressed (and how this is unjust). This is an important conversation to have, but also an exhausting one. As a lifelong fat person, recognizing and challenging anti-fatness seemingly engulfs my life and others' interests in it (at least insofar as this identity is discussed within the Academy).

My worry, to put it differently, is that often when we discuss fatness, we do so from an almost defensive stance. Much of the literature on fatness starts from a point of aiming to dispel myths around fatness—trying to offer careful, compelling reasons that it can be *okay* (that is, that it is not necessarily a moral failing) to be fat. This is an understandable starting point, which can serve dual purposes. First, it can help encourage those (both straight-sized and fat) who live in deeply anti-fat societies to resist the dogma they have been wrongly taught to uphold. Second, it can help console fat people who far too often have been told there *is* something wrong with them in virtue of their weight.

I take Manne's project to be addressing both of these goals. She introduces the book by highlighting that fatphobia, understood as a type of structural oppression, is unjust (11). In tackling the many myths surrounding fatphobia (12–13) that pervade our common understanding, Manne asks us all to work towards a brighter future—a future in which we no longer need to deny our hunger, nor give up our autonomy. My worry is in starting this conversation with what I see as a more "defensive" aim.

To be clear, I recognize the importance of addressing this systemic oppression as Manne does (following in a tradition of many other invaluable authors, like Da'Shaun L. Harrison, Roxane Gay, Marquisele Mercedes, Aubrey Gordon, and Tressie McMillan Cottom). Until we have dismantled that unjust system and unlearned the harmful biases and stereotypes that accompany it, we need to keep working towards fat liberation. Focusing exclusively on beauty or self-love will not save us—as Manne has compellingly explained in the very passage I highlighted at the beginning of this essay.

As a lifelong fat person, my life has been riddled with (and made worse by) the very consequences of anti-fatness that Manne addresses. I was first bullied for my weight in kindergarten, and I was given my first diet book by a relative as a Christmas gift when I was just eight years old. I have been denied medical care for everything from ear infections to tumors to arthritis, all because of my weight—and in the few times when I was afforded any care at all, doctors failed to take seriously my symptoms or past diagnoses, often leading to what could be described most charitably as medical malpractice.

Discussing the harms of fatphobia is a laudable and important conversation. But as I've continued to write on and think about fatness over the past few years, I've longed for more. It is exhausting to have so much of your identity, experience, and others' recognition of your life to be centered around the harms you face in virtue of that identity. There is a crucial difference between starting the conversation from a place of "there is nothing wrong with being fat, contrary to popular belief," as opposed to one of saying "there is so much *right*—so much that is valuable—about being fat."

4. (RE)FRAMING THE FUTURE OF FATNESS

My main worry with Manne's piece—which, to be clear, is a response that is not unique to her book so much as it is a response to the overall state of literature on fatness in academic philosophy[3]—is with where she begins this conversation. Manne has done the important work, following in a long history of scholars in Fat Studies, of demonstrating that fatphobia is unjust. Moreover, much of Chapter 6 of *Unshrinking*, titled "Small Wonder," focuses on Manne's incisive explanation of the unique ways that anti-fatness is manifested within academic philosophy specifically. This gives us a long overdue opportunity to reckon with what traditions and biases we have carried on in the field—the very kind of critical, careful reflection that we often train our students to extend to countless other facets of our lives.

In the spirit of doing this reflection on our discipline as a whole, it would serve us well to take a step back and think carefully about how we frame conversations surrounding fatness. If our true goal is fat liberation—something which must be done, in part, through adopting a politic of body reflexivity—then we should think carefully about how we begin to talk about fatness. So many of these conversations begin in trying to prove that there is nothing *wrong* with being fat, and that our widespread discrimination against fat people is unjust. These conversations are typically done with an underlying commitment that fat people are valuable. (After all, if they did not have value, then we would have less reason to take seriously the harms fat people face as a result of fatphobia.) But as we think about where to move forward as a philosophical community post-*Unshrinking*, it would serve us well to bring this value to the forefront of our conversations about fatness.

I wonder what other futures are possible for us. In seeking true fat liberation and justice, how can we make space for a radical celebration of fatness? In what ways do we hold space to recognize and honor the benefits of being fat, rather than merely reflecting on this identity with a more defensive starting point (against fatphobia)?

To be fair to her project, Manne does end *Unshrinking* by declaring that fat is valuable, despite taking what I've described as a defensive starting point. She explains,

> Fatness can be beautiful, sure, but I think that is the least of it. It can be arresting, provocative, comforting, protective, and deeply countercultural. . . . Fatness, in other words, is something to *value*. If all or even most fat people took the magic weight-loss pill we're imagining, something important would be lost. . . . We would be collectively diminished inasmuch as fatness was eliminated or even rendered a rarity. (190–91)

Drawing parallels between being fat and being trans, Manne frames fatness as a "valid and indeed valuable way of being in the world" (199). My curiosity, however, lays in how philosophy might look were this more often the starting point of our conversations about fatness.

As philosophers, we are trained to believe that our words *matter*—the specific ways we do (and do not) frame a project *say something* about our values and commitments. In highlighting not just that being fat is "okay" in some neutral (and, as I've framed it, defensive stance against fatphobia), and instead more robustly asserting that it is valuable in this more positive sense, we reveal our commitments as scholars. And as someone who takes herself to be committed (as Manne is) to fat liberation, it is this positive framing that I find so greatly needed in conversations surrounding fatness moving forward. I suspect that this framing could also help deepen the significance of Manne's idea of body reflexivity.

5. GLORIFYING FATNESS

In the spirit of doing philosophy about fatness *by* and *with* fat people, we can and should push ourselves further in how we talk about fat, highlighting not just that it's *not bad* to be fat, but that it can be glorious. This is not to say, of course, that being fat is *only* positive—nor is it to prescribe a particular attitude that individual fat people ought to take towards themselves and their own bodies (something which Manne argues is overly burdensome and out of reach for many of us) (202). Instead, it is a call to address our *collective* understandings of fatness (as opposed to our individual relationships to our own—possibly fat—bodies).

A. W. Eaton proposes that one way of addressing anti-fatness is to replace a learned disgust towards fat bodies with a more positive sentiment through aestheticizing those bodies.[4] Especially if we are to take this approach seriously, framing more conversations around fatness from this more positive starting point seems vitally important.

When I first came to fat liberation, I struggled to fully commit to the movement. I had long struggled with my fatness, at points quite literally starving myself in an effort to shrink my body (much like Manne herself shares of her own experience in *Unshrinking*). The thing that helped me more fully change my mindset was seeking out and embracing the good parts of my fat body, learning to see it as a home, rather than as a death sentence (as I'd been told I should see it my entire life). This project of making a home in my body—what I would now, thanks to Manne, think of as a work of body reflexivity—involved thinking of the small wonders and joys my body had brought me throughout the years. It started with recalling how loved I felt in middle school, in the final days of school, where my friends and I hid in the corners of our math classroom killing time before the end of the school year. How many times had my friends rested their heads in my lap or on my chest, using my flesh as a pillow, a safe place to land? If it could be that for them, why couldn't it have that same positive value for myself?

Hearing others speak about their own fat bodies, too, helped my mindset shift. If others—who I loved and respected—could see value in *their* fat bodies, then perhaps there was similar value in my own. I saw this value in my grandmother, whose body, personality, and jewelry were all larger-than-life in equal measure. I recall her pulling me to the side before weddings and homecoming dances, reminding me that "us bigger girls" got to wear bigger jewels to make us shine. Seeing the way her earrings glistened, spreading light along her many chins, or watching her bracelets get lost in the soft folds of her wrists, reminded me that her body—like my body—was magical.

Beyond mere visual value, learning from other fat people has shown me that fat bodies can be so much more than I ever dared to imagine as a child—sources of comfort, connection, power, protection, and strength. Angelina Moles, for example, recounts:

> I have to remind myself that my fatness has cushioned my butt from hard falls while roller skating. My stomach has provided warmth for animals to lay on, for people to cuddle with, for my hands to be warmed. . . . I can give into all the messages of fat hate and anti-fat stigmas that make me feel worthless, and trust me that sometimes I do because it's hard not to. Other times I think about all of the things this fat body has experienced and give thanks to all this blubber that has protected me. . . . I'm turning towards feeling the liveliness of this body. Glorifying it if you will.[5]

In trying to approach ourselves with a mindset of body reflexivity, we give ourselves the room to navigate myriad attitudes towards our bodies, recognizing that they have value regardless of how we feel about them (203). Even when my muscles fail to have the strength I need to make it through my work day, or on days when I am practically glued to my heating pad in hopes of calming waves of overwhelming, chronic pain, my body is still my own. As such, it has value.

My query to Manne, and my ongoing struggle as a very fat person committed to fat liberation, is how to balance our varied, complicated relationships with our own bodies (and a desire to avoid toxic positivity) with what I see as a real need to shift our collective understanding of the value of fatness. Through highlighting the lived experience of many in fat communities who long for room to celebrate their fatness rather than being ashamed of it, I suspect that we will be more easily and fully able to take on board a mindset of body reflexivity. In a world where fat people are routinely taught that they should hate—and, ideally, eradicate—their fat bodies, highlighting the boundless values of fatness is a lifeline that has helped provide solace to so many fat people (myself included). Centering this value is what has made me see my body as my own. While this "home," so to speak, may be imperfect and pain-ridden and often frustrating, it is also mine, and through that alone it is valuable.

Body positivity is often both riddled with toxic positivity, and (at least in its modern state, which has strayed far from its fat-activist roots) rife with ethical concerns.[6] In contrast, body reflexivity seems like a promising relationship to have

towards one's own body, especially insofar as it is more compatible with fat pride than some alternatives (e.g., body neutrality) (204).

As we advance this politics of autonomy, though, we have good reason to keep in mind our rhetorical strategies for advancing this ethos. Starting from a place of highlighting the positive value of fatness can help in this mission, serving as both a lifeline for fat people in dire need of a light in the darkness of an anti-fat world, and as a reminder to all of us that we can think of fatness in a way that radically differs from what so many of us were taught.

6. A COMPLICATED CONVERSATION

This is not to say we can or should only talk about the benefits of fatness. Part of fat liberation, and of body reflexivity, is that we center autonomy by leaving room for a variety of relationships one might have to their own body. Aside from the fact that asking us to see the positive value in fat bodies runs the risk of further alienating those of us at the furthest end of the fat spectrum,[7] we still have work to do in addressing the harms of anti-fatness. Moreover, as Manne notes, we have good reason to resist any kind of toxic positivity (202–203).

To complicate the picture further, for many fat people their bodies are not a source of positivity whatsoever. Val (@val_and.co), a fat, neurodivergent, disabled content creator who founded the #StyleSeated movement, shares such reflections given her chronic illnesses. As she once implored of her audience,

> What if, instead of being a source of strength and vitality, your body feels like a constant battleground—a place of pain and struggle? What if every step is a reminder of limitations, every breath a challenge? The reality is, I don't love my body. I tolerate it. And that's not a failure. It's not a weakness. It's an acknowledgement of my truth—a truth that doesn't make me any less worthy of love, respect, or acceptance. . . . But here's the thing: You don't have to love your body. Your body doesn't have to be beautiful by anyone's standards, including your own. It doesn't have to be a source of pride. It doesn't have to be anything more than what it is—a vessel that carries you through this world, even if imperfectly.[8]

Even with these complications in mind, I still see a responsibility for all of us to think carefully of how (and whether) we center the values of fatness in our conversations about fat people. Walking away from *Unshrinking*, I continue to grapple with the complicated realities of living in this fat body, in this fat-hating society. While I take seriously the worries spurred by things like body positivity, and recognize that there are many people who cannot or do not find positivity in their (fat) bodies, I also see fat bodies as a source of rich, under-appreciated value. What I hope to make room for is an ongoing reflection regarding what could happen if more philosophical work took this as the starting ground—focusing on not just saying that fat isn't bad, but in showing that fat is *good*.

A big part of how people think about fat bodies is, I think, tied to fear.[9] Fear that fat is a death sentence. Fear that if you are fat, you are worthless. Fear that if you are fat, you are unloved and unlovable. Especially in a society so deeply steeped in anti-fatness, people assume that fat people *must* hate themselves, and when they become fat, they often loathe it. By showing these more positive sides to being fat, I wonder whether these fears would be at all dissuaded—whether people could see that there is still value in being fat. By highlighting this value, from the onset of our conversations about fatness, it is my hope that we can learn to see that life as a fat person can be full of pleasure, excitement, curiosity, and adventure. If we truly hope to remake the world to properly fit fat bodies, as Manne calls us to do, then perhaps we can begin by re-examining how we approach conversations about and with fat people in the future.

NOTES

1. Cooper, *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement*, 33.
2. @lizzobeeating, "if ur not a millennial or gen z it's okay," Instagram Reel, posted September 4, 2024. Accessed September 6, 2024.
3. For example, in Aubrey Gordon's vital project, *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat*, she tellingly has a chapter entitled "What Thinness Takes," but there is no comparable chapter on "What Fatness Gives."
4. Eaton, "Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression," 53.
5. Angelina Moles, "Think about How Much Your Fatness Has Done for You," Social Media, *Instagram* (blog), June 16, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CQMRzG_A8pm/.
6. For a fuller discussion of these worries, see Frazier and Mehdi, "Forgetting Fatness."
7. Frazier, "Imperfection as a Vehicle for Fat Visibility in Popular Media," 292.
8. Instagram, August 12, 2024.
9. This is, of course, an oversimplification of the complex system of oppression that is fatphobia. As Manne aims to dispel through *Unshrinking*, fatphobia is not literally and only a matter of fearing fatness or fat people (11). While fatphobia is not merely a matter our individual attitudes about fat people and is instead a structural phenomenon, it is reasonable to think that addressing our individual attitudes will help move us closer to dismantling fatphobia when done in conjunction with other systemic reforms.

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What I Love about Unshrinking, *Why* Unshrinking *Makes Me Sad, and Six Things I'd Like to Talk about with Kate Manne*

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I love Kate Manne's *Unshrinking*. It's a great book about an important topic; I'm very happy she wrote it. The book's central thesis is that contrary to what many of us think, we don't have a problem with there being too many fat people. Instead, we have a major social issue, which is fatphobia. Many of the problems thought to be caused by widespread fatness are, in fact, caused by widespread fatphobia, argues Manne. Connecting fatphobia to its roots in classism, racism, and misogyny, Manne systematically tears apart the myths around larger bodies. I love Manne's thorough and exacting work. It's pretty much exactly the book I would hand someone if I thought I needed to correct their views about size and health. I confess to feeling a little bit professionally jealous. I wish I'd written this book! But I didn't, and so I'm glad Manne did.

Unshrinking is a work of careful research, precise analysis, and argument, yet it's also Manne's personal story. The two aspects of the book blend very well. Manne is a terrific writer, and I applaud her for including her story. She writes, "Where did I learn to hate my fat body?" and talks about her own experiences with fad diets and near-starvation weight loss techniques. The book's impact on me cannot be overstated. Months after reading *Unshrinking*, I still find myself haunted by Manne's personal experiences with fatphobia and her account of her extreme dieting. Her opening story, in which she confesses to feeling "too fat to be feminist in public," left me speechless. Manne writes that she "flinched from the prospect" of doing the usual book tour appearances because of her size. She notes that she didn't do book tours because she was scared of what people would think about her appearance because of her weight. How could such a bright, accomplished woman care so much about what other people think about her looks? I know I might be the outlier here, not Manne, but I do find myself thinking that once you've got a PhD from MIT and a job at Cornell and some pretty amazing books, does it really matter what others think of your size? The tone in the personal sections is pretty sad, and I guess I wanted, for Manne—given the strength of her arguments against fatphobia—a little less sadness and a little more anger at living in such a fatphobic world.

Fatphobia is, on Manne's account, more than just an individual fear of fatness; it's also a form of oppression. Fatphobia is a social system that ranks bodies according to thinness and rewards people in a myriad of ways depending on how closely they conform to the ideal. Fat people are assumed not just to be unhealthy but are also judged negatively in terms of health, moral, sexual, and intellectual status. Piece by piece, Manne carefully unpins the foundations of fatphobia. First, she takes on the association of fatness and ill health. Second, even if there were some connections between ill health and weight, it's not clear that weight loss is possible. If a drug had the same success/failure rate as weight loss diets, it's not at all obvious that doctors would even prescribe it given the near certainty of regaining the weight, the health risks of yo-yo dieting, and the risk of ending up at an even larger size. Third, even if weight loss were possible and there were health risks associated with remaining overweight, people still wouldn't be obligated to lose weight. There's no imperative to eat less or eat differently, to weigh less. Those choices are up to the individual whose body it is. We can take risks with our health in other areas of our lives, so why not here, too?

With dieting, most people can lose a moderate amount of weight initially. Still, the weight comes back almost inevitably, and after five years have passed, between one- and two-thirds of people will end up heavier than when they started. The health effects of going up and down in weight are significant. Independent of your weight, it's not good for your health to repeatedly go up and down in weight. Weight cycling harms our health in many ways, including cardiovascular health, immune function, metabolic function (including the risk of Type 2 diabetes), and mental health. Manne doesn't deny that there is a correlation between being very heavy and not being as healthy in specific ways. However, that is often just as explainable by structural discrimination that leads to people receiving inadequate health care, compounded by the stress of fat stigma and weight cycling.

Another important theme in the book is Manne's reflections on race and the link between racism and fatphobia. Fatphobia is a relatively recent form of prejudice, writes Manne. It's not always been true that fat bodies were seen as unattractive. In the past, fatness was associated with wealth and luxury. Fat women were considered beautiful. Manne cites work by the sociologist Sabrina Strings, who argues that in the mid-eighteenth century, anti-fatness was born out of a need to differentiate white bodies in France and Britain from the Black bodies who were being so brutally enslaved. It's not that fatness was first derogated, and then Black bodies were associated with fatness. It went the other way. Fat bodies and Black bodies were associated, and that was used to impugn fat bodies—and fat Black bodies specifically—shortly after that. That history is important to grapple with, both to see how contingent and historically recent fatphobia in its systemic form is and also to know that it is a powerful tool of anti-Black racism even today.

It's challenging to write a commentary on a book that does—aside from the sad bits—make me want to cheer on the author and yell "Yes!" at pretty much all the essential points. So, I'm approaching this commentary from the perspective of things I'd like to hear more about. There are also places where my view differs slightly from Manne's. If given the chance, there are six points from the book that I would love to discuss with Manne in an extended conversation.

1. MORAL CHOICE AND FAT SHAME

Manne writes that fatness is often framed as a moral issue and that people should feel guilty or ashamed for being fat. The book sets out the view that there's just nothing morally wrong with being a fat person, and part of that is because fatness is mostly unchosen. We all know the maxim that "ought implies can." Insofar as we have little control over our body's size and shape, it just can't be the case that we are morally required to lose weight and should feel shame if we fail. Manne writes that upwards of 70 percent of the human population's variation in body mass is due to genetics, which makes it a little less heritable than height. Yet, it would be clearly ludicrous to think we're morally obligated to be taller.

So, according to Manne, it's obvious that it's not immoral to fail to do something that's practically impossible in the long term for the vast majority of people or could only be done through unreasonable measures, such as taking medication or undergoing bariatric surgery. I'm interested in the connection between bodily shame (regarding our unruly, out-of-control bodies) and moral shame (for the desire for food and the appetite to enjoy meals with other people and experience the pleasure of delicious food).

2. SIZE AND SHAME

I want to say a few things about Manne's own narrative about size and shame. On the one hand, as a smaller fat person and one from a privileged and educated background, I'm not sure how representative her story is of fat women in the United States. One might think, and sometimes I get the sense that Manne does, that if she feels this bad about her weight, just imagine how much worse it must be for larger girls and women. But in the past, I've wondered if that's true.

I think it might be more challenging to live in a fatphobic society if you're a person who is within striking range of society's ideals of thinness. In a blog post called The Unexpected Advantages of Growing Up Chubby, I speculated that being fat as an adult was less personally challenging to cope with if you were also a chubby kid. You had learned how to handle other people's reactions and not to care too much about having a slender physique. I suspect that some of the closer-to-the-ideal-weight women suffer more because they have been inside the beauty norms for so long that it hurts to feel out.

I also think the experience of being fat is different for those of us who identify as queer and who move in a sex-positive and body-positive queer community.

3. BODY POSITIVITY

Manne rejects both body positivity and body neutrality as unrealistic and instead endorses a position she calls "body reflexivity." What is body reflexivity? It's the idea that my body is for me, and your body is for you. Manne wants to give up on the idea that our bodies exist to serve others. Instead, we should regard our bodies as our homes, something which we should completely control. Manne writes that this ethos is connected with a radical politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be queer, to be trans, to be fat, to be old, to be disabled, and so on.

I want to say a few things to defend body positivity. I don't think of body positivity as an individual's obligation to their own body. I don't feel or experience "love your body" as an imperative, as one more thing that good feminists must do. It's not for me one more way to fail as a feminist. Instead, I've always heard "love your body" as a permission. Body positivity opens up space to love and feel regard for non-normative bodies. For me, it's mostly about making spaces, not telling women what they must think and feel. We can understand body positivity too individually and miss out on the critical social and community aspects of body positivity. Melissa Gibson, in Body Positivity: Creating a Space for the Representation of Marginalized Bodies, says that people often think that body positivity is about loving your own body and thinking all bodies are beautiful, but the roots of the idea are far more radical. It's about making room for all bodies outside the mainstream. That includes considerations of size but also age, ability, and race. As Gibson says, it's not just about young, white, smaller, fat women on Instagram feeling positive about their belly rolls.

But Manne is clear that she's positive about the existence of fat bodies even though she doesn't endorse body positivity about one's own body. On page 189, she writes that fat bodies are part of human bodily diversity. "I believe not only that fat people should be respected and treated with dignity, and given access to adequate healthcare, and so on. I believe that our fatness contributes something to the world that is worth having. We add something to the world with our size and shape and sheer existence."

4. PARENTING IN A FATPHOBIC WORLD

Children are on the front lines of the so-called war on obesity, and if there is one thing our fatphobic world hates more than fat adults it's fat children. There is incredible pressure on parents to raise thin children and to model healthy attitudes towards eating and towards our bodies. Parents are judged based on their children's sizes, and fat parents are judged even more harshly if they have fat children.

> If we do have children, and our children turn out to be fat like us—quite likely, given the power of genetics to determine body weight—we will face widespread disapproval. The assumption will be that we eat and feed our children unhealthy food, and that the bullying they face is thus a product of our own poor choices. Even thin parents of fat children will be blamed and shamed for their children's bodies, according to recent research. (32)

My worry about the approaches to feeding children that set out to combat fatphobia is that they overestimate how much effect parents and families can have. It's not that we oughtn't to try to raise children with body confidence who honor their own appetites, hunger, and food choices; rather, it's that doing so in this culture may have little or no effect. Peer groups and the social environment of schools may have more influence than families and so the answers we seek out need to be social and political, not just parental. Otherwise, we risk making the same mistake of blaming parents when parents have little control.

5. THE AUTHORITY OF HUNGER

Manne writes that in a fatphobic society we come to view hunger itself as the enemy. Manne challenges the idea that we should learn to live with chronic hunger (189). Diets leave us perpetually hungry, writes Manne, and we deserve to be free from this. In the chapter called "The Authority of Hunger," Manne talks about her own suffering while dieting and the days in which she wound up eating nothing. She could go four or five days without eating and living with the pain of hunger, unable to sleep because of hunger pangs. In one such episode of self-starvation, Manne finally ate after going seven days without food, and she realized that she couldn't afford to ignore her own hunger.

Manne characterizes hunger as a bodily imperative which constitutes a moral imperative. Her discussion of the ethical obligations that follow from bodily imperatives is fascinating, and I found myself, as a fellow moral theorist, wanting to hear more about this. But my own experiences of hunger and the ways in which it waxes and wanes in response to a variety of hormonal factors have led me to wonder about how reliable an indicator of the need to eat hunger actually is. I actually think the unreliability of hunger is the weak link in intuitive eating as an approach to feeding oneself. Many of us don't feel hungry when we need to eat, and others experience hunger almost all of the time. Given the range of hormones that affect hunger, we may need to interpret hunger as evidence but not, by itself, the whole story.

6. MOVING OUR BODIES AND WHY THAT'S ALMOST NEVER OKAY FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN IN A FATPHOBIC WORLD

Manne writes that exercise has relatively little to do with weight loss, but it does have a lot to do with our health (42–43). Given the evidence of the effectiveness of dieting, it's a plan a doctor ought almost never to recommend, but the opposite is true of exercise. Writes Manne, "When it comes to our health, there is considerable evidence that it is fitness, not fatness, that matters most, and that fitness mitigates many if not all of the health risks associated with living in a larger body. And yet many continue to mistake fatness for the biggest problem." (49)

But weight stigma and fatphobia result in fat people avoiding exercise. If you are going to be harassed or belittled at the gym (or, speaking from experience here, get yelled at from passing cars while on your bike, "get off the road, you fat bitch") you are less likely to get enough movement in your life. Tracy Isaacs and I noted, when doing research on our feminism and fitness blog, how regularly women were running at night, or even on treadmills in backyard sheds, because they were too ashamed of their bodies and didn't want to be seen exercising. Moving less does affect your health, but it's not fatness, it's fatphobia, that's the cause of moving less. I would also add that myths about movement and fatness also result in larger people moving less. If you exercise in order to lose weight and then don't lose weight (because exercise rarely leads to weight loss), you're likely to give up and lose out on the myriad health benefits of exercise.

Likewise, some of these same myths hurt thin people too. Many people choose not to exercise because they think they are at the right weight, and weight loss is the main reason for engaging in deliberate, sustained movement. Fat people, scared away by fatphobia from the gym, sports, and other kinds of movement such as running and swimming, hiking, biking, skiing, and dancing, miss out on the mental health benefits of exercise and from the sheer joy and pleasure that comes from moving our bodies. Also, involvement in sports and athletic achievement are some of the few things that have been shown to positively affect our self-image. If fatphobic attitudes stop larger women and girls from getting involved in sports, the problems caused by fatphobia just get worse.

7. CONCLUSION

Some final thoughts about *Unshrinking*: I will eagerly share it with people who I think are in the throes of a fatphobic worldview. I also hope those who read it don't stop there. What else would I recommend? Aubrey Gordon's *What We Don't Talk about When We Talk about Fat* and Sabrina Strings's *Fearing the Black Body: The Racist Origins of Fat Phobia* come immediately to mind. I recommend that readers listen to the Maintenance Phase podcast and read Virginia Sole-Smith's substack, Burnt Toast. On parenting, we should all read Sole-Smith's *Fat Talk: Parenting in the Age of Diet Culture*. Interestingly, all of these works are on Manne's list of references. I would love to teach a graduate seminar with *Unshrinking* and all of these connected readings. It's a philosophically rich area, and I want to thank Kate Manne for moving fatphobia into the center of concern in contemporary ethics.

Author's Reply to Commentaries

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Let me begin by thanking my six commentators for their generosity and engagement. I am also indebted to Barrett Emerick and Ami Harbin for their kind invitation and organizational labor. It's an honor and a pleasure to get to contribute as a respondent to this special issue on *Unshrinking*.

I won't be able to do justice to all of the insightful comments my commentators have offered. Instead, I will try to home in on an issue raised by each of them that I currently feel able to respond to—albeit often in a tentative or "yes, and" spirit. It's a mark of the remarkably constructive nature of their engagement that there is no need for the sort of defensive rebuttals that some such exchanges in philosophy may necessitate.

In Céline Leboeuf's contribution, she nicely reconstructs my idea of body reflexivity partly as advocating that we suspend *judgment* about our bodies rather than appraising them positively or neutrally—as a correction, of course, to the negativity often leveled at us due to fatphobia in particular or beauty culture generally. This captures the negative piece of the idea of body reflexivity, which I introduce in

the book's conclusion by pointing to the possibility of not assessing our bodies positively, neutrally, or negatively, but rather throwing out the scales of judgment altogether.

I developed this idea for a number of reasons, which Leboeuf is keenly attuned to. For one, there is something both frequently unrealistic and potentially draconian about pushing people to be uniformly positive about a much-maligned and vulnerable subject, in the form of their own physicality. (I should clarify that, if some people do manage it, I certainly wouldn't be critical; but body positivity is the idea that we *ought* to be positive about our own bodies and that of others, not just the idea that we are entitled or permitted to be, at least on my construal.) There's also at least a tension between such positivity and the fact that, for some people, changing their bodies, even in radical ways, is *not* an expression of the kind of conformism and kowtowing to pernicious social standards that I worry about in *Unshrinking*. Rather, as in the case of trans folks, it may be a way of reclaiming their body and becoming more fully themselves. Body positivity is to some extent an awkward fit with recognizing the validity and importance of bodily transformation for some people.

But Leboeuf (and Samantha Brennan too) is quite right that there's been good work that goes under the broad heading of body positivity. Body positivity is both the simple idea above and a popular hashtag: it would be surprising if the latter did not encompass more than the former, particularly because the hashtag is sometimes (I think mistakenly) used as a synonym for what I would prefer to call "body liberation."[1] I am also sympathetic to the proposal, made by Nichole Wood-Barcalow, Jessica Alleva, and Tracy Tylka, that body positivity can be separated out from a positive body image—which includes body appreciation, care, and love. Leboeuf's commentary raises an excellent further question: What is the relationship between a good body image in this sense and body reflexivity?

I've mentioned the negative piece of body reflexivity, but there is a positive piece as well: the claim that, instead of judging your body in any way whatsoever (even assessing its value as neutral), you should change the way you think about it, in terms of its teleology. I offer, in this vein, the following little mantra: my body is for me; your body is for you. And so on, and so forth, for everyone in the world—and plausibly, we might add, every non-human animal.

One possible way of further cashing out this idea is in terms of Marilyn Frye's notion of "the loving eye."[2] I was intrigued by Leboeuf's suggestion here partly because I think *rejecting* the idea of what Frye calls "the arrogant eye," in contrast, is exactly what I was trying to get at in my book's conclusion. She writes, as Leboeuf says, that for the arrogant perceiver, everything in the world is either "for me" or "against me." This makes women look like consumable sex objects—or, else, defective rejects—and non-human animals look like meat. It makes a tight bolt appear "stubborn" and a woman who makes the wrong dinner—or none at all—appear insubordinate to her husband even at the level of visual perception.

And it is the eye I am implicitly talking about when I open the conclusion by discussing Jordan B. Peterson's obnoxious remarks that the plus-size model, Yumi Nu, is "not beautiful." "Sorry," he says, and of course he's not sorry. His remarks suggest something meant for him, made for him, indeed offered to him personally. When her image is not pleasing to him, due to her fatness, he rejects it in the high-handed manner of someone who's been given a gift that's insultingly out of touch with his taste, his powers of discernment.

Such bodily dissection and discernment, and the arrogant eye that feeds into it, is what my husband is implicitly rejecting when he says that he doesn't look at me with "a critical eye." I am glad Leboeuf picked up on this parenthetical. This was usually something my husband said, I should add, when I used to ask him whether he'd noticed that I'd gained (or, occasionally, lost) a minor amount of weight. He would say, I think truthfully, that he hadn't, because he wasn't looking at me appraisingly. He wasn't "sizing me up." He would add (bless him) that he just saw the person he loved, his partner, or some variant.

And truly, I get it. I feel the same way about him. I feel the same way about my family members and friends and, hopefully, people generally. And I think that *many* people look that way at others, particularly young children. That is, until children reach a certain, critical age, we tend not to look at their bodies in an appraising, judgmental way. (Unless they are deemed *too* fat, which is a distressing possible judgment leveled even at some infants, which Virginia Sole-Smith has brilliantly analyzed.)[3] But with young children, much of the time, we just see them as themselves, and view them in a way that is appreciative without being appraising. We see their bodies as for themselves, to enjoy and learn and run around in. (As the latter idea highlights, I don't mean to suggest that there are no problems whatsoever here—on the contrary, there *are* worries about ableism and healthism to mull over in particular.) I think this attitude is also common when it comes to the non-human animals we keep as pets: dogs, for example. There's a reason why "We Rate Dogs" is a parody account on X (formerly Twitter), with every delightful creature garnering more than a 10/10. The idea of rating dogs is just too ridiculous.

One might even say that there's only one group of people who reliably garners aesthetic judgment about their bodies, as they come of age: girls and women (as well as, plausibly, other gender-marginalized people). This points to the fact that such appraisals are far from compulsory. And that the internalized male gaze which we often speak of is really the internalized "arrogant eye" of Marilyn Frye's famous theorization.

But is the antidote to the internalized arrogant eye to develop a *loving* eye, specifically, and train it on our own bodies? I don't doubt that this is a useful resource, but I don't think it is an all-encompassing solution either.[4] In part this is because, as Leboeuf points out earlier in her commentary, attitudes other than love, including not only care and compassion, but also negative emotions like frustration, may be appropriately trained on our own bodies inasmuch as they can betray us. And it is also because I

think the antidote to the internalized arrogant eye may be partly a matter of *not looking* or, perhaps, *no longer needing to look* at our bodies much whatsoever. Leboeuf herself suggests, in other places, the idea of focusing more on what we feel or sense; the suggestion to think about what our bodies can *do* is also common (and, again, potentially problematic from an anti-ableist perspective).[5] I embrace all of these ideas as important but, again, likely not all-encompassing.

For my own part, body reflexivity has meant that I don't necessarily look at myself that much or focus on bodily sensations that much either. I experience my body, at this moment in my life, primarily as a vehicle for getting around the world and looking at—as well as otherwise taking in—ideas and events and other people. In a certain sense, my experience of my body has become pretty minimal. And this feels like not only a kind of victory, but a balm, a relief, a reprieve. Preserving these possibilities, which have long been the exclusive province of privileged boys and men, strikes me as one thing body reflexivity can do for us: along with helping us to cultivate the healthy, interesting, and sustaining relationships with our bodies that are almost as diverse as the bodies themselves, on my reckoning.

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One question I've often been asked, in the course of researching and presenting my work on fatphobia, is the relationship between fatness and disability. This question has taken salutary forms—philosophers sympathetic to the social model of disability wondering whether fatness can perhaps be understood in the same way—and also terrible ones—a radio host who said the quiet part out loud and wondered whether we could possibly accept the "severely obese" bodies who encounter mobility challenges. "Think about the people who use mobility scooters because they're so large they can't even get to the shops anymore," she said, smugly wringing her hands. "I'm not fatphobic, but surely you must admit there's a problem there" before going on to tout the glory of semaglutide. (I discontinued the interview; I wasn't going to contribute to such a doubly stigmatizing discourse.)

I will admit that my worries about feeding into such stereotypes have limited the ways I've drawn on the philosophy of disability in *Unshrinking*, a work of public philosophy. This is to record a quandary I still don't know quite what to do about: even if construing fatness as closely related to disability *correctly and sensitively conceived* would be illuminating, even essential, construing fatness as closely related to disability *conceived as insensitively and crudely as is typical* is clearly a disaster, a recipe for fatphobia—and yet more ableism. And my worry is that, in even attempting the former, I would be misunderstood due to careless misreadings along the lines of the latter. If you look at some of the least charitable and auspicious reviews of my book, you can find the disgust leveled at very large bodies tied ineluctably to the suspicion that some bodies are just too large to *not* be disabled—and that those who *are* disabled are somehow invalid in needing what they need, such as assistive technology. (Think of the condescending pity viewers of the dreadful film *The Whale* are invited to feel for Charlie in needing a bar to pull himself up in bed and a walking frame and wheelchair. Fatphobia here draws on ableism in order to rationalize itself and excuse its jejune cruelty.[6])

What *is* accurate and important is Clarisse Paron's observation (echoed by Alison Reiheld) that some bodies' largeness is indeed disabling in a society whose material structures are built exclusively for smaller folks: everything from health-care resources to airplane seats to dining chairs.[7] Whether or not this means that fatness can therefore *be* a disability will depend, of course, on how you define disability. On a social model of disability, as Elizabeth Barnes defines it, "disability is the disadvantage produced by social prejudice against certain types of persons (persons with impairments). Were society not organized in a way that penalizes people with impairments, there would be no disabled people. Disability just is the negative net effects of having an impairment in a society that discriminates against those with impairments."[8] I am persuaded by Barnes's argument, however, that this pushes the bump in the rug to what an *impairment* is, exactly, and is also implausibly committed to the idea that *all* impairments would be trivial in a non-ableist society. Given this stance, I don't need to get into the question of whether fatness of certain kinds should even be counted as an impairment (something which, for the record, I am not that comfortable in saying).

I am sympathetic to Barnes's own alternative social *constructionist* model of disability, according to which a person, S, is physically disabled in a context, C, iff:

(i) S is in some bodily state x

(ii) The rules for making judgements about solidarity employed by the disability rights movement classify x in context C as among the physical conditions that they are seeking to promote justice for.[9]

Unfortunately, however, this now leaves the question of whether fatness is, by itself, sometimes a disability seemingly unanswered: it's at least unclear whether disability rights activism properly extends to people who have trouble navigating the world because and only because it is not made to accommodate the size or weight of their bodies. (That these are *related* and *entangled* struggles should be uncontroversial for all of us. But is it one and the same one?)

So here's where I land: I think it's important to acknowledge that some fat people are disabled (on any definition of disability—because they are blind or paraplegic, say), and some fat people are not. And some fat people will count as disabled due to their very fatness on some humane models of disabilities and not others (or, more accurately, the answer as to whether or not they are disabled may be, at least as far as I can tell, indeterminate). But regardless of this complexity, these only partly overlapping Venn diagrams of populations, I remain sympathetic to Paron's hunger for more intersectionality in *Unshrinking* with respect to disability. Here's what I think I should have said

there: we can acknowledge the distinction between fatness and disability *while holding that fatphobia and ableism are deeply in cahoots* in society as we know it. Indeed, my very hesitation to get deeper there is due to this very fact. But our expectation that bodies should look and function within a certain narrow range—as is convenient from the perspective of late-stage capitalism—is offensive and oppressive. Plausibly, then, resources from the philosophy of disability and disability theory more broadly will be deeply relevant to a fuller treatment of fatphobia and continued research on this subject.

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To move from one issue I've not yet gotten to the bottom of to another: the way concerns about health are frequently used as a pretext or cover or excuse for fatphobia. That is, people with no real expertise about a fat person's health status in particular or the complex relationship between weight and health in general will say things like "I'm just worried about your health!" as a way to justify their advice that a fat person lose weight through diet and exercise (or, now, take Ozempic). This despite the fact that weight regain is then the rule, not the exception (including in the 80 percent of cases when people *stop* taking Ozempic due to its side effects), and that the health ill effects of weight cycling are very well documented.[10]

Of course, the weaponization of health discourse against fat people is well recognized within fat activist circles (notwithstanding Reiheld's fair criticism that I could have said more about this in *Unshrinking*). What is less well studied, and deserves more philosophical attention, is how to analyze these phenomena using the tools of contemporary philosophy of language.

One suggestion I made in *Unshrinking* is that the very word "health" and its cognates (e.g., "healthy") may, in some contexts, function as something like covert dogwhistles for fatphobic sentiments.[11] For example, in Chapter 2, I ask the reader to imagine a fatphobic relative saying, "I just saw Cam, who doesn't look very *healthy* nowadays," about your childhood friend, who you haven't seen in over a decade. In many Anglo-American contexts, you'd naturally assume that your friend Cam has gained weight and that your relative disapproves of that. (Interestingly, according to my informants, in some non-Western contexts with a more recent history of food scarcity, this relative might be heard to imply that Cam is now so thin as to look sickly to their eye.)

I also consider in this connection the ways that talk of "healthy" food is often tantamount to food that is assumed to be conducive to weight loss. This in service of the point that, although I felt the need to include a chapter on the (again, complex) relationship between weight and health in *Unshrinking*, I did so with a sense of real trepidation: we need to talk about health, to be sure. But we also need to recognize the way the *discourse* about health is often turned like a knife against fat folks.

In Vanessa Voss's commentary, she proposes the complementary idea of fatphobia often being masked by figleaves. The basic idea here, which again draws on work in the philosophy of language by Jennifer Saul, is that people often make fatphobic statements which pass as acceptable by being cloaked in supposed health concerns. "I'm not fatphobic, but fat people do need to take care of themselves and get healthy" and "I would never fat shame anyone, but I'm worried about your health" are representative examples of such fatphobic figleaves.

I think this is an excellent suggestion, but I do want to raise a question about fatphobic dogwhistles and figleaves both. A premise of much of the work on these tools of manipulation in the literature is that anti-racist norms are accepted by a considerable proportion of the population—hence the utility of what Saul calls *covert effect racist dogwhistles*, which act on some such people without their awareness, and *racial figleaves*, which provide cover for utterances which would otherwise be conspicuously racist and thus unacceptable. The thing about fatphobia, though, is that it remains a very prevalent form of prejudice, even in liberal and progressive circles. (Note this is distinct from the common and, frankly, ridiculous idea that fatphobia is "the last acceptable form of prejudice." If only!) As I write in the introduction, it is the only form of implicit bias studied by Harvard researchers that is known to be on the rise, as well as the form of explicit bias that is decreasing the most slowly.[12]

So I have the hunch that the preponderance of fatphobic dogwhistles and figleaves may have more to do with *self*-image and moral defensiveness than these are necessary tools for spreading the gospel of weight loss. That is, the utility of these moves may have more to do with the speaker than they have to do with the audience. I leave this for other philosophers, better-versed in the subtleties and technicalities of the relevant literature, to explore. Whatever the case, I am completely in agreement with Voss's overall case that fatphobia is a threat to good reasoning and philosophical acuity much more than fatness is. As I remark, their fatphobia sees philosophers like Peter Singer and Daniel Callahan making arguments that are not only cruel; they are also not very clever. Meanwhile, fat people have some of the deepest insights to offer about the vagaries and vulnerabilities of human embodiment—a central philosophical concern, at least in my book.

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I want to close by talking about my own positionality in response to the commentaries by Samantha Brennan, Alison Reiheld, and Cheryl Frazier—who raise many important distinct concerns and excellent further questions, to be clear, but also one that I think I see a common thread in. Namely, who am I to talk about fatness now? Despite all of their generosity and care in approaching this question, it is one I feel acutely given my current level of fatness.

As Reiheld notes, I talk about myself when I talk about fat people: I use the first-person plural—"we," "us," "our." I do this because I have been fat virtually my whole adult life, and I identify strongly as a fat person to this day. But I am now, somewhat awkwardly, in one of my smaller incarnations.

Shortly before I began the writing project that would eventually become *Unshrinking*, I went through a difficult period where I would stop eating for days at a time. It was during the first year of the pandemic, when my attempts at a low-carb diet had almost no effect on the scales. I was desperate to lose weight. And so I just stopped eating.

It was a terrible idea and an even worse time. I won't rehash it here because the details are not that important; they are anyway all in the book and I am always cognizant of the risk, in speaking of this, that I inadvertently have the opposite influence than the cautionary one I intend. I opened up about it in the last chapter of *Unshrinking* partly because the awareness that larger people may suffer from disordered eating, or even full-blown restrictive eating disorders, is still all too rare. A person with atypical anorexia—which involves all the same symptoms as so-called typical anorexia bar being underweight—will typically receive no help or support for over a decade after seeking treatment.[13]

When I began to work on *Unshrinking*, I fully expected to regain the weight. But it never really happened: or, rather, it hasn't happened *yet*, since I do still expect it to. Bodies are weird and mercurial and wildly unpredictable. Mine is now a somewhat awkward fit for public fat activism. Some people have written me, angrily, saying I'm not fat enough to represent them properly. Others have looked me up and down at book events and declared me not fat at all, in a surprised or disappointed or seemingly neutral spirit. These reactions (and others Reiheld documents) are all fair, and I don't know quite what to do about them. I am certainly *historically* fat, which matters here, and I wonder what level of fatness would be required to represent all fat people—given that size diversity within fatness is, as Frazier points out, vital to acknowledge. Trying to represent all fat people thus seems, just as she argues, deeply misguided.

For most of my life, I have been a "small fat" person, who requires plus sizes but who doesn't struggle to fit into most of the spaces designated for bodies in society—airplane seats have felt tight but I've never needed a seatbelt extender. (Whereas mid fat, large fat, and infinifat people face more barriers in these regards, in more or less direct proportion to their size, given the inaccessible and fatphobic built environment as we know it.[14]) Arguably, this has made my life as a fat person easier in most ways but harder in one; coming somewhat close to some beauty ideals for some periods in my life made them frustratingly elusive, rather than too far out of reach to even try to meet, as Brennan astutely suggests. Whatever the case, my story of struggling to fit into academia, which Brennan reacted to as sad, is not meant to be a sob story so much as to highlight a predicament I had the privilege to highlight at this point in my life. (Although I fully acknowledge the validity of Brennan's reaction and, for my own part, found it interesting to realize that the sadness of my tone hadn't even dawned on me; I was aiming to elicit something like anger or indignation.)

Philosophy is a discipline where so many bodies—especially fat, Black, brown, trans, non-binary, and disabled bodies—are excluded that those of us who get past the gatekeeping have an obligation to protest the barriers and try to break them off their hinges. That was my intention in "Small Wonder," the chapter that tries to show how prejudiced we are against the irrepressible flesh, against fatness, and against anything feminized, in philosophy. I close with the observation that fat people are amongst the smartest and wisest about the way that our bodies are unruly and uncontrollable—wild, even. I hope that complements my closing suggestion that bodily diversity in size as well as skin tone and disabilities and gender expression is not merely tolerable; it is actively valuable and worth proudly celebrating.

But Frazier is right that there's something lamentably defensive about *Unshrinking* for much of its length. I was particularly ambivalent about the chapter effectively defending fat people against the charge that we are necessarily unhealthy. I do think that I needed to include this discussion, and the (complex and surprising) data about this, given where we are as a culture in the discourse around fatness. But that doesn't mean that this framing doesn't come with real costs and even harms that Frazier is, in my view, quite right about.

I love Frazier's idea of a more radical and liberating premise: not just what fatness *doesn't* cost and what the pursuit of thinness takes (to adapt a line from Aubrey Gordon), but rather exploring what fatness *gives* that remains unsaid and perhaps unsayable. Certainly, as someone who has been quite fat and is now much less fat (borderline fat?), I find there is much to miss: my former lushness, my softness, my strength, and perhaps above all, my hitherto power to surprise people that my fat body housed an analytically sharp mind (well, on a good day, anyway).

What Fatness Gives is in many ways a more exciting and potentially liberating project than *Unshrinking*—whose slightly defensive, reactive character is betrayed even by its title (my book is not, after all, called *Expanding* or similar). I am not sure we are ready for it, culturally, but I hope that we get there. I hope Frazier writes it. I will be an early and avid reader.

I thank all of my commentators, from the bottom of my heart, for their contributions, which I have learned so much from. I wrote *Unshrinking* partly to find community: to build solidarity on the basis of a body that had long felt like a liability. Writing it felt, viscerally, like lifting my head out of shame and meeting the reader's gaze, saying, "It's like this for me, how about you?" Finding intellectual as well as bodily community in doing so has been such a joy, such a privilege—and never more so than on the present occasion.

NOTES

1. My sense is that Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott's nice ideas, the majority of which I'm very sympathetic to, as Leboeuf anticipates, extend well beyond body positivity to a blueprint for body liberation, despite the organization's branding (see, e.g., https://thebodypositive.org/about-us/).
2. Frye, "In and Out of Harm's Way."
3. Sole-Smith, *Fat Talk*.
4. Note in this connection that "the loving eye" is, for Frye, the opposite (or contrary) of "the arrogant eye," *The Politics of Reality*, 75. I am proposing that what body reflexivity needs and

invites is the *negation* (or contradictory) of "the arrogant eye" instead.

5. See Leboeuf, "Anatomy of the Thigh Gap"; and Kite and Kite, *More Than a Body*, respectively.
6. See my "The Whale's Point of View," https://katemanne.substack.com/p/the-whales-point-of-view.
7. I mean *constitutively* disabling to fat bodies, but there is a plausible causal claim in the offing too: if you can't access health care, due to the size of your body, then you may well *become* disabled in another way due to that lack of access.
8. Barnes, *The Minority Body*, 25.
9. Barnes, *The Minority Body*, 45.
10. See Manne, *Unshrinking*, Chapter 2.
11. Note that Saul takes a bifurcated approach to dogwhistles, distinguishing these "covert effect" ones from *overt code* ones such as white supremacists using "88" to mean "Heil Hitler" on the internet. See Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 9–10.
12. See *Unshrinking*, 9.
13. *Unshrinking*, 179, where I draw on important research by Erin Harrop. As I say there, "atypical" anorexia is actually the more common variant.
14. In differentiating these degrees of fatness—as well as at many other points throughout *Unshrinking*—I draw on important work by Ash Nischuk, creator of *The Fat Lip* blog and podcast: http://thefatlip.com/.

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