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Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression

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The popular (at least with young people in the US) clothing company Abercrombie & Fitch does not offer women's pants in a size larger than an American 10.[1] Since the average size of women in the US is reported to fall between 12 and 16, one is led to wonder why the company deliberately excludes a potentially significant market. When asked about the role of sexual attraction in his advertising campaign, Abercrombie & Fitch CEO Mike Jeffries provided some insight into his company's exclusivity:

> [Sexual attraction is] almost everything. That's why we hire good-looking people in our stores. Because good-looking people attract other good-looking people, and we want to market to cool, good-looking people. We don't market to anyone other than that. . . . In every school there are the cool and popular kids, and then there are the not-so-cool kids. Candidly, we go after the cool kids. We go after the attractive all-American kid with a great attitude and a lot of friends. A lot of people don't belong [in our clothes], and they can't belong. Are we exclusionary? Absolutely. (Denizet-Lewis 2006)

Although Jeffries' comments were not explicitly aimed at justifying his company's small sizing for women, people very quickly put two and two together: Abercrombie markets to only "cool," "attractive" people, and women who wear larger than a size 10 are neither "cool" nor "attractive."

"Cool" and "attractive" are decidedly aesthetic concepts (as explained in what follows), and in employing them here Jeffries implicitly expresses an all-too-familiar distaste for fat bodies. While some ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities, as well as some individuals, may not share this aesthetic preference, distaste for fat bodies lies at the center of what I shall call our *collective taste in bodies*; that is, the set of aesthetic preferences for particular body-types that dominates the prevailing forms of cultural expression in

[1] I presented a much earlier version of this paper at the Central APA in March, 2011, where I received extensive helpful comments and challenges from Susan Feagin, as well as Noël Carroll and Jesse Prinz. I also presented a short version to the Disability Studies program at University of Illinois-Chicago in the fall of 2013 where I received many helpful comments and challenges, in particular from Carrie Sandahl. Paul Taylor made an interesting point about the connection of fat negativity to classism and racism that I did not have time to address. Finally, I am grateful to Sherri Irvin and three anonymous reviewers of this volume for their helpful suggestions.

our society today.[2] (Just to be clear, *taste in bodies* refers *not* to taste as a bodily sense but, rather, to the kind of taste that takes the body as its object; that is, by *taste in bodies* I mean taste directed *at the body*.) Fat bodies are rarely represented in mainstream forms of entertainment and advertising; but when fat bodies *are* represented, it is usually as unattractive, ridiculous, contemptible, and even gross and disgusting.

Even among those who agree that this is a problem, it is common to conceive of the prevailing and ubiquitous aesthetic distaste for fat bodies as a mere symptom of a deeper underlying fat negativity that is driven by stereotypes, misinformation, and other false beliefs. This way of thinking is part of a broader tendency to relegate aesthetic preference to the epiphenomenal: it is common, when thinking about oppression, to conceive of taste as caused by—but not itself having an effect upon—more fundamental cognitive attitudes, typically construed as beliefs. It is our beliefs, on this picture, that are the true motor of our tastes as well as of social life more generally. This picture sets up the expectation that if we can just educate people by providing correct information about fatness, then our conduct toward fat people, along with our aesthetic preferences with regard to the size and shape of bodies, will follow suit. I'll refer to this as "the standard picture."

While I do not mean to underrate the importance of stereotypes and false beliefs in perpetuating fat negativity, I contend that the standard picture is misguided in its underestimation of the role of aesthetics in instituting and maintaining oppression. I argue in this essay that distaste for fat bodies, which is rooted primarily in one's sentiments rather than in beliefs, is an important *constitutive element of the oppression of fat people*. That is, the prevailing distaste for fat bodies is not a mere secondary phenomenon resulting from fat negativity and discrimination but, rather, is part of what, in the first instance, establishes and maintains the implicit biases, reactions, habits, norms, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices that make up what is sometimes called *fatism* (or, if you prefer, "size oppression," "fat oppression," or "fat negativity"). If this is right, then combatting fatism requires changing not only what we believe about fat people but also how we *feel* about fat bodies.

I make the case for the central importance of anti-fat taste in the following way. Section 1 develops a model of oppression that attaches as much importance to agents' *sentiments* (which I construe broadly as occurrent, intentional, affect-laden mental states) and *tastes* (which I also construe broadly as dispositions and habits of valuing that are based on sentiments) as it does to agents' beliefs and principles. My model pays special attention to cases where sentiments and beliefs conflict. Since sentiments and tastes rarely yield to evidence and reason, the model proposed in Section 2.1 forces us

[2] Our fat-negative collective taste in bodies is decidedly white, heterosexual, and, among other things, ableist. There has been considerable work, for instance, demonstrating that African-Americans and Latinas/os tend to embrace body ideals that are noticeably heavier than the ideals embraced by whites. For an overview, see Rubin, Fitts, and Becker (2003). It is worth noting that most studies focus on ideals for *women's* bodies and not men's bodies, which is further evidence for my claim that fatism affects women more than it does men.

to embrace some new strategies for combating fatism (as well as other modes of oppression of which taste in bodies is a central mechanism, i.e. ableism, ageism, homo-negativity, racism, sexism, and trans-negativity). If my model is right, then traditional modes of instruction that focus on correcting stereotypes and misinformation will not by themselves suffice to undermine systemic oppressions of the sort just mentioned. As a supplement to traditional modes of instruction, Section 2.2 recommends the Aristotelian strategy of habituation by means of vivid and engaging representations—from high art to popular forms of entertainment and advertising—that aestheticize fat bodies. Section 2.3 concludes by critically examining recent deployments of this strategy in the service of combatting fatism.

Before we begin, I want to be clear that "fat" is used throughout this paper as a value-neutral descriptive term. This is in keeping with standard practice in Fat Studies and also in the Fat Pride Community. The basic idea is to avoid seemingly well-intentioned euphemisms like "saftig" or "heavy" that depend on the tacit understanding that "fat" is an impolite term of derision, and also to avoid euphemisms like "overweight" and "obese" that medicalize fat as a disease. Unabashed use of the term "fat" as value-neutral is a small part of a much larger project of combatting the all-too-common notions that fat is unacceptable, inferior, unappealing, and must be eliminated.

2.1 Taste and Oppression

Body size is often omitted from the familiar list of features around which modern forms of oppression center—the list often looks like "race, class, gender, disability, etc."—and fatism is rarely specifically mentioned by theories that purport to explain the general structure of modern forms of oppression.[3] Yet fatism is one of the most ubiquitous, conspicuous, and overt forms of oppression in our culture today. We live in a fat-hating world, one that regularly refuses to accommodate fat bodies; that openly and unabashedly teases, bullies, shames, and stigmatizes fat people from early childhood onward; and that discriminates against fat people in a variety of ways.

Here are just a few examples of fatism's multifarious manifestations in the material conditions of lived experience:

- Lack of appropriately sized seats in planes, theaters, restaurants, classrooms, and other public spaces. At the time that this essay was being written, several major airlines in the US—for instance, American and United—require passengers who

[3] For instance, fat oppression does not appear on Iris Marion Young's (1990) purportedly comprehensive list of oppressions, nor is it mentioned in Ann Cudd's systematic analysis of oppression (2006). I expect that both philosophers would of course acknowledge fatism's existence and argue that their analyses apply to this phenomenon as well. I mean simply to highlight a stark contrast between the ubiquitous overt hostility to fat that plagues our society, on the one hand, and the fact that in our best theories fatism is ignored, on the other hand.

cannot buckle their seatbelt to purchase an additional seat for themselves (Cheap Air 2013, Hetrick and Attig 2009, Huff 2009).[4]

- There is well-documented bias and discrimination against fat people in, for instance, the workplace, especially with respect to hiring, wages, and promotion and termination (Puhl and Heuer 2009). It has recently been shown, for instance, that fat white females earn 11.2 percent less than their non-fat counterparts (Cawley 2004).
- Fat children are more likely to be teased and bullied (Rimm 2004; Weinstock and Krehbiel 2009).
- Fat teens are much less likely to date (Cawley 2001; Cawley, Joyner, and Sobal 2006).
- Fat people are less likely than thin people to receive proper medical treatment due to a lack of appropriately sized medical equipment (gowns, cuffs, stretchers, imaging equipment, etc.), negative attitudes on the part of healthcare providers, and the assumption that fatness automatically precludes health (Puhl and Heuer 2009).
- Arguably more than any other group, fat people are *openly* mocked and ridiculed in all aspects of popular culture and are offered few, if any, positive representations of themselves.

These and the many other manifestations of fat hatred in our culture are the focus and target of the rich, exciting, and relatively new (in comparison to other academic fields dealing with race, gender, or disability) field of Fat Studies. Fat Studies aims to uncover, analyze, and combat the causes of widespread discrimination against fat people. In this literature, these causes are typically construed as prejudicial *beliefs* of various sorts: e.g. implicit or explicit, occurrent or dispositional, and held with varying degrees of confidence. An example of such prejudicial beliefs are commonly embraced stereotypes of fat people as lazy, weak-willed, unhygienic, greedy, or gluttonous.

While I do not mean to deny that stereotypes and false beliefs play a significant role in maintaining the oppression of fat people, in this essay I urge that we also attend to what one might call the *sentimental* dimension of fat oppression. Fatism, I shall argue, is instituted and maintained not only by misguided beliefs about fat people, but also by misguided *sentiments*; that is, as noted earlier, occurrent, affect-laden, object-directed

[4] United Airlines' stated policy is that it will not board a customer who requires additional seating but declines to purchase an extra ticket. (See their official policy at <http://www.united.com/web/en-US/content/travel/specialneeds/customersize/default.aspx> accessed November 2015.) American Airlines also requires that passengers purchase another seat, but they at least acknowledge that they will reseat a passenger who needs, but has not purchased, an additional seat next to empty seats if available and time allows. (See their official policy at <http://www.aa.com/i18n/travelInformation/specialAssistance/extraSpace> accessed November 2015.) But nothing prevents an airline from accommodating different body sizes. Southwest Airlines, for instance, offers two options: one can purchase two seats in advance and then Southwest will refund the price of one ticket, or one can arrange for the required number of seats at the gate. (See their policy at <https://www.southwest.com/html/customer-service/extra-seat/?clk=GFOOTER-CUSTOMER-COS> accessed November 2015.)

mental states such as emotions and also some feelings and pleasures. To be more specific, fatism is partially constituted and maintained by our malformed hopes and fears, loves and hates, and, most important for the purposes of this essay, our malformed *taste*.

Before we move in Section 2.2 to a discussion of what I mean by "taste," I want to reiterate that when I say "our taste" I mean to refer to the *collective* taste that is manifest in the aesthetic that dominates mainstream media and guides policies like that of Abercrombie & Fitch. This notion of *collective taste* is meant to acknowledge the important fact that some ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities, as well as some individuals, do not adhere to the dominant aesthetic, and that this is sometimes on purpose as the result of having cultivated strategies of resistance. The other point to keep in mind is that this collective taste targets both fat and thin people, albeit in different ways.

2.1.1 Taste defined

Since the role of taste in bodies in fatism, as well as in other kinds of oppression, has received less attention, we should take some time to clarify the concept. By *taste* I mean an individual's or collective's standing disposition for evaluative sentiments regarding some x—whether a particular thing or a kind of thing—where these sentiments are partially or fully constituted by or based on pleasurable or displeasurable responses to some of x's properties. As noted earlier, I construe *sentiment* broadly here to include various occurrent, affect-laden, object-directed mental states such as emotions and also some feelings and pleasures. By *evaluative* I do not mean that these sentiments need involve explicit appraisals of the worth of the object toward which they are directed; rather, the phenomenology of these sentiments is to present their object as valuable and so worthy of experiencing, having, or preserving (or as disvaluable and so to be avoided or discarded). To "have a taste for x," then, is to have the standing disposition to take pleasure in x based on some of x's properties, whereas to have a distaste for x is to have the standing disposition to be displeased by (or to have an aversion toward) x based on some of its properties. This is the sense of "taste" in play when in this essay I speak of a person's or a group's *having a taste for* thin bodies or *a distaste for* fat ones.

Taste is not here restricted to the sense that has been the focus of much philosophical aesthetics, namely the rarefied faculty for discerning aesthetic excellence. *Taste* as I construe it is not necessarily contemplative or disinterested, nor need it be directed at high art or nature. Rather, I mean the concept in the expanded sense that concerns what has come to be called *everyday aesthetics*.[5] Taste can be—and most often is—directed

[5] *Everyday aesthetics* has become its own sub-field within philosophical aesthetics to which many articles and books have been devoted. My understanding of *taste* in the everyday sense has been strongly influenced by Yuriko Saito's excellent study (2007), which also contains a useful bibliography on the topic. See also Irvin 2008a and 2008b. For a criticism of Irvin's argument, and of in general overextending our concept of the aesthetic, see Soucek 2009.

at everyday things like food, fashion, home furnishing, popular culture, automobiles, and people; in particular, at people's bodies. I refer to the latter as *taste in bodies*, by which, as I have said, I mean *not* taste as a bodily sense but, rather, taste directed *at the body*. At its most general level, a person's *taste in bodies* is her sense of what makes a person (herself or another) physically attractive or unattractive.

Taste in bodies is a complex matter. For one thing, our taste in bodies takes as its object more than the body strictly speaking, and extends to: things that we *do* with our bodies, like kinds of bodily comportment; the way we *care for* and groom our bodies; and things that we *put on* our bodies, like clothing, makeup, and jewelry and other bodily accouterments. Further, physical attractiveness and unattractiveness have many modalities—e.g. beauty, handsomeness, cuteness, sexiness, and chicness, on the one hand, and ugliness, dumpiness, repulsiveness, and dowdiness, on the other hand—that admit of degrees and that interact in complex ways. Finally, taste in bodies is not merely other-directed; it also importantly includes one's evaluative feelings regarding oneself and what would make oneself pretty, handsome, sexy, statuesque, lithe, chic, tidy, or otherwise attractive.

2.1.2 The social and moral significance of taste in bodies

In emphasizing taste's everyday dimensions, I do not mean to suggest that taste is trivial or practically insignificant. On the contrary, everyday taste has far-reaching moral, psychological, social, and economic ramifications that are nowhere more apparent than in the case of taste in bodies.

Most of us tend strongly to underestimate the extent to which perceived physical attractiveness affects our unrelated assessments of others.[6] We like to think that physical attractiveness is irrelevant to our treatment of a person; to our evaluations of her worthiness as a friend, employee, or mentor; to grading her work; to deciding whether she merits a raise or promotion; and so on. While, of course, physical attractiveness *ought* to be irrelevant to such matters, psychologists have long recognized physical attractiveness as one of the most powerful forms of *halo effect* (or *halo bias*). The basic idea is that most of us exhibit a strong tendency to rate individuals perceived to be physically attractive higher than those deemed less attractive with respect to personality traits and characteristics such as intelligence, various kinds of competence, and trustworthiness.[7]

The halo bias attending perceived physical attractiveness significantly affects a person's prospects in most arenas of life. As Deborah Rhode—one of a growing number of scholars working on what has come to be known as *lookism*—notes, "appearance

[6] Patzer (1985, 10–13) discusses studies that demonstrate people's underestimation of the extent to which perceived attractiveness distorts their evaluations. This underestimation is a specific case of a widespread excessive confidence in the rationality of judgment described by Kahneman 2011.

[7] Although she does not use the term "halo bias," Rhode 2010 offers many examples. Also see Verhulst, Lodge, and Lavine 2010 for a recent study finding that perceived attractiveness is one strong predictor of judging someone capable of leadership.

imposes penalties that far exceed what most of us assume or would consider defensible" (Rhode 2010, 23). People perceived as unattractive, or even just "plain," are not only less likely to be judged smart, interesting, and likeable than those deemed attractive; those perceived as unattractive are also more likely to receive unfavorable treatment in legal settings, are less likely to be hired and promoted, earn on average lower salaries, and so on (Patzer 1985; Rhode 2010). All of this has far-reaching, and sometimes quite severe, negative consequences for self-esteem and interpersonal relations.

Fat people are among the most common targets of appearance discrimination and bias (Rhode 2010, 102). This is not surprising since weight has become, in our culture, such an important component of physical attractiveness, where fatness is routinely portrayed as a paradigm of unattractiveness, especially for women.[8] Being considered unattractive *because fat* has negative implications in places where one might not expect it, like in the attitudes of highly trained healthcare professionals. Evidence suggests that in addition to holding a host of negative stereotypes about fat people, a majority of healthcare professionals have negative aesthetic attitudes toward their patients. In a survey of over 600 physicians, more than 50 percent viewed "morbidly obese" patients—defined as BMI > 40—as awkward, unattractive, ugly, and noncompliant, while other studies similarly show that a majority of healthcare providers report feelings of disgust when caring for fat patients (Foster et al. 2003; Hebl and Xu 2001; Brown 2006; Puhl and Heuer 2009). There is evidence to support the hypothesis that these negative aesthetic judgments render patients *antipathetic* in the eyes of caregivers and that this in turn negatively affects the care that fat people receive; e.g. physicians spend less time with fat patients, and fat women are one-third less likely to receive breast exams, Pap smears, or gynecologic exams (Fontaine et al. 1998).

The role of our collective taste in bodies in maintaining certain kinds of oppression has recently received attention in both philosophical and psychological work on disgust. (Although the term "taste" is rarely used in this literature, disgust lies at one extreme of a spectrum of sentiments that form part of a person's taste profile.[9]) Disgust, it has been shown, plays a significant role in generating certain social and moral norms such as rules of etiquette, incest taboos, and purity norms.[10] More relevant for our purposes, disgust can play a pivotal role in demarcating and maintaining group boundaries by vilifying and dehumanizing a given outgroup. For instance, judging certain groups to be disgusting—groups such as women, Jews, Blacks, homosexuals, and untouchables—has historically played, and continues to play today, a key role in maintaining prejudice and xenophobia, and in enforcing the marginalization

[8] For instance, women are more likely to perceive themselves as overweight, to have dieted, and to express anxiety about their weight. For some overview, see Tiggeman and Rothblum 1988.

[9] For a compelling and provocative account of disgust construed as a component of "taste" more narrowly construed as that rarefied capacity to appreciate art, see Korsmeyer 2011.

[10] For a summary of this vast literature, see Kelly 2011, 144–5.

and subordination of these groups.[11] I suggest that something similar is going on with fat negativity: the deformation of our collective taste in the direction of aversion to fat bodies, rendering fat repulsive in the eyes of most, is an important part of the debasement, stigmatization, marginalization, and subordination of fat people. In this way, our collective taste in bodies is misguided and unjust, and must be changed.

2.1.3 An objection concerning health

I have been arguing that our collective distaste for fat plays a constitutive role in fat oppression and so is unjust. In presenting this thesis in both formal and informal settings, I have regularly encountered the following objection: our collective distaste for fat is explained by the fact that this distaste is a direct response to fat's unhealthiness. We are displeased by fat, so the objection goes, because we are displeased by the state of unhealth and its causes. Since fatness significantly increases health problems and the likelihood of death, the objection concludes, we are rightly displeased by bodies that instantiate fatness. For brevity's sake I will refer to this as "the health objection."

Before addressing the objection directly, there are two things to note about it. First, the objection purports not merely to explain the causal origins of our collective distaste for fat; it is not simply a story about how we have come to find fat unappealing. More important, this objection attempts to *justify* fat negativity by linking it with something that most consider to be objectively undesirable, namely "unhealth"; that is, morbidity and mortality. Second and related, if the link between fatness and morbidity/mortality is a justification at all—more on this in a moment—it justifies only collective *distaste* for fat; that is, it (purportedly) justifies only the fact that we collectively find fat to be unappealing. The (purported) link to unhealth does *not at all justify* the various stigmatizing and discriminatory practices that this distaste motivates, for it is utterly unacceptable to shame or discriminate because someone is unhealthy or deemed unattractive. Here we might also note the complex intersection of fat negativity with ableism.[12]

Despite hyperbolic media attention to the so-called "obesity epidemic," the question of whether and to what extent fatness increases the likelihood of early death or morbidity remains controversial.[13] First, a growing body of literature shows that unless one is of class II obesity or above (BMI = 35+), being overweight (BMI = 25–29.99) or moderately obese (where BMI = 30–34.99)—which is by far the largest class of "obese" persons in the US—does not by itself put one at significant risk for early death.[14]

[11] For the connection between disgust and oppression in the philosophical literature, see: Nussbaum 2001, especially 34–50; Nussbaum 2004; Kelly 2011, especially chapters 4 and 5. Also see Miller 1997. For psychological studies regarding disgust's central role in the enforcement of outgroups generally, see Harris and Fiske 2006. For recent work in psychology on disgust's role in shaping people's moral perceptions of homosexuals, see Inbar et al. 2009 and Olatunji 2008.

[12] I owe this point to Carrie Sandahl.

[13] For criticisms of claims about the so-called "obesity epidemic" see Boero 2013 and Campos 2004.

[14] The most comprehensive study is Katherine Flegal et al. 2013. See also Lantz et al. 2010 and Mehta and Chang 2011.

Further, the overweight category has recently been shown to be significantly associated with *lower* all-cause mortality, and there is evidence that moderate obesity (class I, where BMI = 30–34.9) *protects* against health conditions associated with senescence.[15]

But what of morbidity? Even if fatness does not cause early death, surely, proponents of the health objection insist, fatness is the cause of serious health problems.

While fatness is associated with various health problems, it has not been conclusively established that fatness *causes* all of these problems; in many cases something else may be the cause. For instance, recent research suggests that fatness and poor health may be collateral effects of a common cause, namely poverty.[16] The basic idea here is that poverty leads to poor nutrition, a sedentary lifestyle, limited access to healthcare, and psychological stress, all of which causally contribute both to health problems and to fatness.[17] And there is mounting evidence, from studies that include an objective measure of fitness as a covariate with obesity, that when one controls for fitness, much of the health risk associated with obesity becomes almost insignificant.[18] (This, by the way, is one of the main points of the "Health at Every Size" movement, where physical flourishing is determined independent of a particular body's size.) None of this is to say that fatness does not directly contribute to any health problems—some studies mentioned here do show that class II and class III obesity are directly associated with some negative health effects—but, rather, that the health risks associated with fatness have been poorly understood and greatly exaggerated by popular media.

I have just argued that current research undermines the *justificatory* component of the health objection; i.e. since fatness is not by itself an objective measure of health, one cannot legitimately point to morbidity in order to demonstrate the rightness of our collective distaste. However, the health objection could be reformulated to accommodate this: the pervasive erroneous *belief* that fatness is a direct cause of morbidity/mortality explains our collective distaste for fatness. After all, as already noted, the causal link with morbidity is often adduced in support of fat-negative attitudes and conduct. If what matters practically for fat negativity is what people tend to actually believe about fat, then perhaps all we need to do is educate people about the very complex relationship between fat and health in order to dispel pervasive ignorance about fat.

While I think that we should of course provide better education about the complexities of the relationship between fat and health, I doubt that this will by itself undermine our collective distaste for fatness. This is because I strongly suspect that the health objection is a red herring, adduced *post facto* to justify and disguise what is at bottom a

[15] For the positive association with overweight, see Flegal et al. 2013. For the protective effects of moderate obesity see Lantz et al. 2010.

[16] For a recent longitudinal study based on a nationally representative sample of over 3,600 adults, see Lantz et al. 2010. See also Ernsberger 2009.

[17] There may be a feedback loop at work here, insofar as fat people are the objects of workplace and other kinds of economic discrimination, which makes them poorer. See Ernsberger 2009.

[18] Thus concludes Lantz et al. 2010. Also see Church et al. 2004; Katzmarzyk et al. 2004.

discriminatory attitude. As evidence of my suspicion, consider other bodily states that (a) are known to significantly increase risk of various health problems yet (b) are not stigmatized as repulsive or otherwise unattractive but (c) in some cases are even aestheticized and admired. Think of, for instance, extreme thinness of the sort seen in supermodels, a few of whom—among others, Ana Carolina Reston and Isabelle Caro—died of anorexia nervosa. Or consider elective cosmetic surgeries and other medical procedures such as breast implants, Botox injections, and facelifts: although such procedures come with known significant health risks, some of them quite severe, this does nothing to diminish the aesthetic value of the outcome. Or, to take yet another example, tanned skin, especially (though not exclusively) for whites. Although it has been known for decades that tanning significantly increases the risk of melanoma, tanned skin (for lighter skinned people) is still highly aestheticized in our society, and as a result, indoor tanning is on the rise in the US to the extent that some classify it as a genuine public health concern (Gery et al. 2014). Tanning and thinness are just two examples of a variety of cases where the *known* unhealthiness of a particular bodily state does little or nothing to undermine that state's attractiveness and desirability. This strongly suggests that our collective revulsion to fat bodies is *not* ultimately a response to the (mistaken) belief that fat is unhealthy.

We should consider one remaining variant of the health objection before dispensing with it altogether, namely that fatness is only rarely congenital and is instead most often the result of poor lifestyle choices.[19]

As noted earlier, fatness is strongly correlated with poverty, and so considering it the result of "lifestyle choices" is highly doubtful. But let us assume that the poor-lifestyle-choice claim is true. For most of us, quotidian life is shot through with activities and practices that we openly acknowledge increase our risk of illness, harm, and even death. To take just one example, most of us *choose* to drive or ride in automobiles, where the risks of injury and death are remarkably high (to say nothing of what it does to the environment, which indirectly has negative effects on health).[20] We take these significant health risks because they afford benefits that we value so much as to outweigh the risks; for instance, the risks of driving or riding in automobiles are, most think, worth taking because we greatly value the convenience that automobiles afford. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, is true of, say, cosmetic surgery and chemical treatments to hair (e.g. dying, bleaching, perming, or relaxing), as noted earlier. Modern life, especially modern urban life, is built around this kind of trade-off which, in most cases, does not suffer from any de-aestheticization, stigmatization, discrimination, or other negative social consequences. Were fatness unequivocally unhealthy (which, as already explained, is true less severely and less often than typically claimed by critics of fat) *and* were fatness the result of a "lifestyle choice" (which, as noted earlier, is

[19] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer of this volume for this variant of the health objection.

[20] The average individual's lifetime risk of death by automobile accident is something like 1 in 84 (Pope 2007).

doubtful), then fatness ought to number among the very many health risks that we regularly willingly take in order to obtain ends whose value outweighs the risks. Instead, fatness is routinely singled out as an "epidemic" and fat people are openly discriminated against and mocked and shamed, often in the name of "health." I mean to suggest that this concern for health is, in the overwhelming majority of cases, phony: whether conscious or not, the pervasive hyperconcern for the physical well-being of fat people is typically little more than an attempted cover-up of what is at bottom a discriminatory attitude.

2.1.4 Four notable features of taste in bodies

I have been arguing that our collective distaste for fat should be considered—alongside pervasive misinformation and stereotypes—a primary mechanism for maintaining social hierarchy. Since most of us internalize this distaste without our being aware of it, simply increasing awareness will not suffice to make the distaste go away. Before turning to the question of what *will* eradicate this distaste in Section 2.2, we consider in this section four features of taste in bodies that present considerable challenges to modifying it.

First, the pursuit of being perceived as attractive and desirable plays an inestimably large role in most people's lives, affecting and organizing much of daily activity. As noted in the earlier discussion of halo biases and lookism, being perceived as attractive involves much more than finding mates; it also typically means being considered likeable, trustworthy, competent, and admirable, all of which increase a person's success in various domains. Putting these two things together—(1) that the stakes for being perceived as attractive are very high and (2) that the dominant standards of attractiveness in our society are strongly skewed toward aversion to fat bodies—makes it difficult to resist internalizing the aesthetic ideal of thinness. Rejecting this ideal risks forfeiting one's likeability, credibility, and worthiness in the eyes of many. It's no wonder that Americans spent an estimated $60 billion in 2012 trying to lose weight (PRWEB 2013).

Second, fatism hits women harder than men (Rothblum 1992; Bergman 2009). One reason is that, as John Stuart Mill noted long ago, the importance of appearing attractive is unevenly distributed between the two sexes, being of exaggerated importance to women: "being attractive to men [has] become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character" (Mill 1869/1998, 16). Women—especially, but not exclusively, heterosexual women—tend to care deeply about appearing attractive to both men and women, whereas men tend to care considerably less. A quick inspection of women's magazines or a comparison of the women's and men's cosmetics and toiletries aisles of any drugstore confirms this. Even when women are quite accomplished in arenas that were once the sole province of men and have nothing to do with physical attractiveness, women still feel the need to publicly demonstrate physical attractiveness: witness, for instance, IndyCar racer Danica Patrick's bikini modeling, or the many female Olympic athletes who have posed nude for professional photographers.

It is not surprising, then, that women make up around 85 percent of the consumers of the weight loss industry.

Third, this de-formation of our taste under fat oppression affects *both* the privileged and the oppressed. It is not only the privileged who strongly tend to find members of an oppressed group, say, disgusting and misshapen, but the oppressed themselves internalize the dominant taste as well and, at least on one hand, tend to find themselves unattractive, perhaps even disgusting, and in constant need of improvement. Fat self-hatred is rampant (Gimlin 2002). In this way, the oppressed come "to exercise harsh dominion over their own self-esteem," as Sandra Bartky, following W. E. B. Du Bois, puts it (Bartky 1990, 105; Du Bois 1903/1986, 364–5).

A fourth notable feature of taste in bodies, as with all taste, is that it resists rational persuasion and is often norm-discordant; that is, it conflicts with one's explicitly held normative commitments. A person's sense of, for instance, the beautiful and the ugly, or the sexy and the repulsive, or the dumpy and the chic, is relatively immune to argument and evidence and is rarely undermined by contrary cognitive considerations. A compelling argument for why one *ought not to* be repelled by a certain physical trait or body type or physical act will do little on its own to undermine one's repulsion. Taste's recalcitrance is due to what I earlier called its *sentimental* basis. As has long been noted, taste is grounded in emotional and hedonic responses, and even if one accepts a generally cognitivist approach to emotions and pleasure—that these are forms of perception that represent things, properties, and states of affairs and that have a judgment-like structure—one must nevertheless concede that it is difficult, if not impossible, to argue oneself or another person into or out of finding a particular physical trait, kind of body, or physical act attractive.[21] What this means is that one can both have the justified belief that fat hatred governs social relations and the conviction that this is morally wrong *yet nevertheless find oneself disgusted by fat bodies*. This has important implications for thinking about how to change taste in bodies, as we'll see in Section 2.2.

2.2 An Aristotelian Approach to Changing Taste

> [F]at liberation occurs only when we embody it physically as well as accepting it politically and theoretically.
>
> Heather McAllister (2009, 305)

I have been arguing that it is not enough, when fighting fat oppression, to focus on widely accepted misinformation about fat people. We must also work to undermine our pervasive collective distaste for fat. One big problem, as we saw in Section 2.1, is

[21] A good example of this is the norm discordance of disgust. For example, a recent psychological study shows that subjects who are disgusted by homosexuality are much more likely to have unfavorable associations with gay people as opposed to heterosexual people, even when these subjects do not explicitly endorse the view that homosexuality is morally wrong. See Inbar et al. 2009.

that taste rarely conforms to our considered views and deeply held principles. Taste is in this regard recalcitrant, stubbornly resistant to guidance by reason and knowledge. So how do we go about changing it? How can we generate alternatives to our collective fat-negative taste?

2.2.1 Virtue and taste in Aristotle

I find it helpful to consider this question in the context of the problem of moral education as Aristotle conceived it. For Aristotle, moral education involved not simply teaching correct principles to guide action, but also, importantly, shaping a person's affective orientation, especially insofar as this involves bringing her to "find enjoyment or pain in the right things" (Aristotle 1999, 1104b 12–13).

Full virtue, on Aristotle's view, consists not simply in knowing the right thing to do and then acting on this knowledge, but also in having the right character. This in turn centrally involves experiencing the appropriate affects—emotions, feelings, and pleasures and pains—with the appropriate intensity toward a given object or set of circumstances. A fully virtuous person (a) is delighted by, desires, and appreciates noble and just actions, (b) is disgusted by, despises, and eschews ignoble and unjust actions, and (c) has these affective states with the appropriate intensity (Aristotle 1999, 1104b 8–9). On this point Aristotle is concerned not just with isolated sentimental episodes; rather, a virtuous person has *the standing disposition* to take pleasure in noble actions and displeasure in vicious ones. I suggest that in this way virtue, on Aristotle's account, consists partially but importantly in having the right sort of *taste* as construed above.[22] I mean to extend this account to taste in bodies as well.

Since Aristotle believed virtue of character does not arise naturally in most of us (Aristotle 1999, 1103a 19–20), he addressed the question of how to educate a person's taste—their appetites, desires, and capacity for particular pleasures and pains—so that they come to "enjoy and hate finely" (Aristotle 1999, 1197b 26). Aristotle thought of what I here call *taste* as "unreasoned," as Miles Burnyeat (1980, 79) puts it in the way discussed with respect to taste in bodies in Section 2.1: no amount of argument or evidence, no matter how persuasive, will by itself convince a person to take pleasure in what formerly repulsed her (or to be repulsed by that which formerly pleased her), to delight what she formerly abhorred (or vice versa), to develop the appetite for that to which she formerly had an aversion (or vice versa). But if not by appeal to knowledge and reason—that is, if not by educating the intellect—how do we train taste?

2.2.2 Aristotle on habituation

Aristotle's answer is that we train taste, and thereby acquire virtue of character, through habituation: "Virtue of character [i.e. of *ethos*] results from habit [*ethos*]; hence its

[22] Some commentators use "taste" to describe the standing disposition to take pleasure in noble and just actions. See, for instance, Burnyeat 1980, especially 79: "the point about those of the young who have been well brought up is that they have acquired a *taste* for pleasures—namely the pleasures of noble and just actions—which others have no inkling of" (my emphasis).

name 'ethical', slightly varied from 'ethos'" (Aristotle 1999, 1103a 17).[23] By "habituation" he seems to mean repeated exposure: "a state [of character] results from [the repetition of] similar activities" (Aristotle 1999, 1103b 21, p. 19).

At first blush, this notion of how to educate taste raises tough questions, beginning with what I'll call the problem of acquired taste. To call an item an *acquired taste* is to say that it is unlikely to be enjoyed and appreciated by someone who has not had substantial exposure to the item. The seemingly Aristotelian suggestion underlying this notion is that repeated exposure to a thing can lead one to enjoy, appreciate, and develop the appetite for it. But can repeated exposure *by itself* accomplish this? After all, if I'm disposed to be disgusted by x, repeated exposure to x would at most lead me to *tolerate* x. (And here we might note that the stronger the initial disgust, the less likely that exposure will lead to tolerance; sometimes, for instance, strong aversive reactions are intensified by repeated exposure.[24]) However, it seems highly unlikely that repeated exposure to x would *by itself* lead me to take pleasure in, enjoy, appreciate, and develop the appetite for and capacity to appreciate x.

There is a second and related worry about habituation understood as repeated exposure. Recall that on Aristotle's account virtue consists in "loving *and hating* finely"; one must learn not just to take pleasure in the right sort of thing, but also to take *displeasure* in the proper sort of thing. Yet it is especially difficult to see how repeated exposure to x would lead one to be *displeased* by x, particularly if one were initially oriented so as to like x (as opposed to simply feeling neutral about x). If x were toxic in large quantities—for instance, alcohol, tobacco, sugar—then an overdose of x would plausibly lead one to develop a distaste for x. But this kind of case has limited application. For many things that one finds pleasurable, repeated and frequent exposure to x would at most lead one to tire of x, but this is far from coming to hate x.

I do not mean to deny that repeated exposure is a component of successful habituation, but it is doubtful that repeated exposure can *by itself* yield the sorts of changes in taste that Aristotle intends.[25] How, then, is habituation supposed to work?

At this point we should pause to notice that the problem of acquired taste is complicated by the following variables, many of which Aristotle recognized. First, the aspect of taste in need of modification might be not a particular kind of feeling or appetite but, rather, the degree of intensity with which it is felt.[26] Second, the susceptibility of one's taste to alteration depends on the degree to which one's taste is woven into one's character. This is why Aristotle thinks it best to begin habituating taste at an early age,

[23] Aristotle mentions habituation as the means to acquiring virtue of character in Aristotle 1999, 1103a 17ff, 1103b 16–22, 119a 27, 1121a 34, 1151a 18–19, 1152a 29–34, 1179b 5–1180a 3, 1180a 15.

[24] Thanks to Sherri Irvin for this point.

[25] Indeed, recent psychological work on exposure effects suggests that repeated exposure would be an important component of habituation. My point here is simply that it is not sufficient for successful habituation of the sort envisioned by Aristotle.

[26] "Some appetites and pleasures are for fine and excellent kinds of things, such as wealth, profit, victory and honor. About all these and about the things in between people are blamed not for feeling an appetite and love for them, but for doing so in a particular way, namely to excess" (Aristotle 1999, 1148a 24–8).

before misguided taste has firmly taken hold. This is not to say that changing the taste of adults is impossible—as we shall see, there is plenty of evidence that mature taste can be changed—but the more ingrained the taste, the more difficult it will be to alter it. Third and related, likes and dislikes exist in degrees. The more intensely I like or dislike x, the greater the extent to which my taste or distaste for x will resist change. Fourth, the project of changing taste can be undertaken from the inside, where the agent intentionally sets out to change her taste, or from the outside, where someone else aims to change one's taste. In the former case, the process of changing one's taste is facilitated by two things: first, the agent's desires for self-improvement and, second, her own imagination.

With respect to the last of these variables, consider the following example. Craig is disgusted by vegetables, but because he knows that they are good for him, he wants to make them a regular feature of his diet. Further, Craig (a) knows incorporating vegetables into his diet will be easier if he doesn't merely tolerate vegetables, but if he actually *likes* them, and (b) wants to be the sort of person who enjoys eating healthy things. Repeated exposure to vegetables might get Craig to tolerate them, but he wants something more; he wants actually to acquire the taste for vegetables. Craig tries to alter his feelings about vegetables by acting *as if* they were tasty. He starts with vegetables that are most similar to things he does like, such as meat, and he incorporates them into dishes that he already likes. Finally, it is important that he create *positive associations* with vegetables by initially restricting his consumption of them to times when he is enjoying himself, and performing visualization exercises where he vividly imagines himself eating vegetables with vigor and enthusiasm.[27] How successful this is and how much time it takes depends on the variables already outlined as well as on Craig's powers of imagination, but if he has a chance of changing his taste, these sorts of *as if* actions are his best bet.[28]

Self-improvement projects offer the ideal case of altering one's taste, because the agent can supply her own vivid imaginings that draw upon and cater to her other desires and inclinations.[29] Cases where the subject does not see any fault with her taste, and so does not desire to change it, are trickier. When we cannot rely on the subject to do her own imaginative work, how does one habituate another person whose taste is misguided to "loving and hating finely"? (To be clear, this is relevant to our question of how to redirect people's taste away from fatism and toward size equality.) I suggest that the self-improvement case offers an important clue, namely that engaging the subject's

[27] This is, for instance, the kind of visualization training used by many high-level athletes. See McGee 2000.

[28] I get the term *as if action* from Bovens 1995.

[29] As Jon Elster 1983 (especially chapter 2) points out, however, some kinds of self-improvement projects are doomed to failure; i.e. those where the desired state resists being deliberately induced. For instance, one cannot achieve indifference by directly trying not to care about something. Indifference is what Elster calls a *by-product* that can only be achieved as the result of an action undertaken for some other end.

imagination in the right way is an important component in altering one's taste. We explore this idea in Section 2.2.3.

2.2.3 Changing taste through representations

In a few key places, Aristotle suggests that something more than mere repeated exposure would be helpful (if not required) in habituating one to love and hate finely; namely, imaginative engagement with mimetic art.[30] Aristotle's basic idea is that "imitations" (mimesis)—by which he means poetry, painting, sculpture, music, and dance—prompt their audiences to have particular sentimental responses to represented objects (characters, inanimate objects, events, situations, and the like), and in so doing inculcate a predisposition to have the same kind of response to similar objects in the real world. This raises two questions. First, how do representations train our sentimental responses on kinds of objects? Second, how does this develop in us a disposition to respond this way in real life?

Mimetic representations, for Aristotle, embody what one might call an "as if" structure. Rather than simply mirror (or attempt to mirror, as Plato would have it) a pre-existing object (person, action, state of affairs), mimetic representations, on Aristotle's account, give us a picture of possible realities, a sense of what it would be like for the world to be a certain way. This is achieved by prescribing feelings to the audience and directing them toward the represented object.[31] In so doing, an effective representation can get us to see a thing in terms in which we would not normally see it: it might, for instance, get us to see something that we thought disgusting as tasty, or—to the matter at hand—something that we previously found to be disgusting as attractive.[32] This means that despite what is often thought about the concept of "mimesis," on Aristotle's account mimetic representations are much less like windows offering unimpeded access on to an imagined world than they are like filters that guide and structure our attention to and feelings about that world.

We can now see why at certain points Aristotle recommends engagement with mimetic representations as an important part of the habituation required to achieve true virtue. By vividly engaging our sentiments and training them on a particular kind of object, representations can get us to imaginatively engage in the kind of "as if" actions, mentioned at the end of Section 2.2.2, that can help us to acquire a new taste.

[30] The clearest formulation is in Aristotle 1984, Book VIII Section 5 (especially 1340a 11–25) where Aristotle recommends music (which he counts as a mimetic art) as a means of properly orienting a person's appetites and sense of enjoyment. Similar remarks are to be found in Aristotle 1987, 1.1447a 13–28 and Aristotle 1984, 1.11.1371b 4–10.

[31] The word "prescribe" is a bit of contemporary jargon used by philosophers of art to denote a work's calling for a particular response from its audience. It is important to note that the term is *normative* rather than descriptive: to say that a work *prescribes* a response is to say that the audience must have this response in order to understand and appreciate the work properly, *not* that all audiences do or will in fact have the response.

[32] As Stephen Halliwell (1992, 248) puts it, "representational works do not offer us deceptive pseudo-realities, as Plato had sometimes contended, but the fictive signification of possible reality in particular artistic media that can be recognized and judged as such."

In this way, imaginative engagement with representations can effectively shape a person's taste in the direction of virtue.

But in order for imaginative engagement with representations to have an effect on our attitudes and dispositions toward the actual world, it is important, on this account, that the representation in question capture *general* features of things of that type. It is only insofar as a representation directs our sentiments *not* at one unique individual but, rather, at an object seen as an instance of a larger class, other members of which we encounter in real life, that we can reasonably expect our imaginative "seeing as" to leaf out into the world.[33]

There are two points to make about this position. First, although the account usually takes works of high art as examples, nothing internal to the argument requires that the works in question be art with a capital "A." What's important for the account is that the works vividly engage the imagination and direct affective responses toward represented objects. This is to say that the account applies to the realm of popular culture and in particular to popular representations of fat, as we shall see in Section 2.3. Second, although Aristotle and the philosophers of art following him discuss the potential of imaginative engagement with representations to *educate* one's taste and other sentiments, the model lends itself equally well to explaining how some representations can adversely shape one's taste. By eliciting the wrong sentimental responses to represented objects, representations can deform our taste. This, many suggest, is exactly what has happened with our collective preference for Barbie-style female bodies and our collective distaste for fat bodies.

2.3 Aestheticizing Fat

> Any time a fat person gets on a stage to perform and is not the butt of a joke—that's a political statement.
>
> Attributed to activist-performer Heather MacAllister (Ellin 2007)

Aristotle offers a promising strategy for combatting the perversion of our taste in bodies under fatism; namely, that we produce and widely promote vivid, imaginatively engaging, and artistically interesting representations that *celebrate* fat bodies and encourage us to see them as likeable and attractive.

There are plenty of canonical works in the European artistic tradition that could be marshaled for this purpose. Consider, for instance, Rubens' many paintings of relatively fat women. Whether or not Rubens *intended* his art to promote fat acceptance,

[33] The basic picture is that by prescribing affective responses to a given state of affairs, art offers a vivid sense of what it's like to hold a distinct perspective on oneself, others, and the world. This view has recently been developed by philosophers of art who, in various ways, argue that by training our affective responses on imaginary objects, art can educate our emotions and, in this way, should be considered a significant source of moral knowledge. For an overview, see Carroll 2000, pp. 360–9.

many of his paintings lend themselves to the kind of Aristotelian project of bending taste in the direction of fat acceptance. ("Rubenesque," after all, has long been an approving euphemism for fat, at least on women.[34]) Rubens' paintings *entice* the audience to see fat bodies as attractive by couching fat women in a traditionally lauded and canonical code of beautification. Consider, for instance, Rubens' *Venus at Mirror* (1614/15, Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna), which employs a standard high-art mythological code and pays direct homage to *the* master of sensual fleshy nudes, Titian (compare to Titian's *Venus at Mirror*, *c*.1555, National Gallery, Washington, DC), although Rubens' Venus is fatter than any Titian ever painted. The painting encourages us to find the fat body beautiful by endowing the subject with other beautifying qualities: e.g. she has a standardly (for the time and place) pretty face, flowing shiny golden hair, and is bejeweled and surrounded by luxuriant fabrics. This beautification is heightened by the painting's formal qualities: the rich and contrasting palette of golden tones and the looseness of brushstroke lend her flesh a softness and opulence and make her hair and surrounding drapery shimmer with gauzy lightness and an overall coloristic flair for which Rubens was famous.

A contemporary example of high art aestheticization of fat is a group of photographs by actor Leonard Nimoy titled "The Full Body Project."[35] These are high-contrast black-and-white photographs of unclothed fat women who often strike classical poses informed by art masterpieces such as Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* (1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art). The women are pictured as proud and confident, boldly engaging the camera directly as they strut, dance, and laugh. Nimoy's pictures celebrate and glamorize the women's girth and fleshy abundance.

Rubens and Nimoy are just two examples of how vivid and sensual pictures can begin to bend fat-hating taste in the direction of fat appreciation. By couching fat bodies in an already-accepted visually aestheticizing rhetoric, these pictures *entice* an audience *that is not already so inclined* to see fat bodies *as if* they were attractive, in the manner described in Section 2.2.3. (I do not mean to suggest that this is the only function of such images; of course they can also serve to reaffirm and reinforce those who have managed to resist the dominant distaste for fat.)

However, there are several potential shortcomings of the Rubens–Nimoy strategy. First, one might worry that, in its current form, this strategy adopts and promotes "the male gaze."[36] The concern here is that by focusing almost exclusively on the *female* body (typically in various states of undress), such work perpetuates the sexual objectification of women and what Sandra Bartky calls an "obsessional . . . preoccupation of many women with their bodies" (Bartky 1990, 28).[37] Photographer Laura Aguilar

[34] Even in Dutch: *Rubensiaan*.

[35] Thanks to Searah Deysach for referring me to these. Images available at <http://www.rmichelson.com/artists/leonard-nimoy/the-full-body-project/> (accessed November 2015).

[36] For an argument about how to understand properly the concept of "the male gaze," see Eaton 2008, 877–8.

[37] I discuss this problem with respect to high art in the European tradition in Eaton 2013.

offers an antidote to this problem. While Aguilar's photographs often take fat nude female bodies as their subjects, the photographs aestheticize in a way that resists the sexually objectifying male gaze. For instance, Aguilar often locates her nudes in nature in a way that not only harmonizes the rhythms of body and landscape—of crevices and valleys, mounds and outcroppings—but also emphasizes the fat body's monumentality, grandeur, and dignity. As Daniel Perez puts the point, "Aguilar consciously moves away from societally normative images of Chicana female bodies and disassociates them from male centered nostalgias or idealizations" (Perez 2013, 1).

A second worry is that all of these examples are works of high art which, given its elite nature, couldn't be expected to dislodge what I've been calling our "*collective* distaste" for fat. To begin to answer this worry, one might point to the fact that we are beginning to see more visually aestheticizing representations of fat bodies in mainstream advertising. Some of these, like the "Dove Campaign for Real Beauty" and the growing number of ads employing so-called "plus size" models, take a small step in the right direction by aestheticizing bodies that are larger than typical models.

However, there are at least two problems with most of these advertising campaigns. First, they focus exclusively (as far as I know) on aestheticizing *women's* bodies, and so reinforce our collective obsessional preoccupation with women's appearance.[38] Second, most mainstream ads are deficient in their failure to promote *genuinely fat* bodies; instead, major clothing companies tend to employ "plus size" models who are smaller than the average sized woman in the US.[39] Against this there is a growing demand that clothing companies promote genuinely fat models like Alex LaRosa and Tess Munster.[40] In addition, some argue that clothes for fat women ought to be integrated into general collections, as they are for men, rather than segregated into special collections that typically offer considerably less variety and are considered to be less stylish (a deeply aesthetic concept) than "regular" collections.[41]

So while the mainstream is slowly moving in the direction of aestheticizing at least female fatness, there is still much work to be done, both to dislodge our collective distaste for fatness and to do so in a way that does not perpetuate gender inequality. A mainstream gender-equitable fat-positive campaign would sometimes eroticize

[38] As Ann Friedman puts the point, "These ads still uphold the notion that, when it comes to evaluating ourselves and other women, beauty is paramount. The goal shouldn't be to get women to focus on how we are all gorgeous in our own way. It should be to get women to do for ourselves what we wish the broader culture would do: judge each other based on intelligence and wit and ethical sensibility, not just our faces and bodies." "Beauty Above All Else: The Problem With Dove's New Viral Ad," *NYMag*, April 18, 2013. <http://nymag.com/thecut/2013/04/beauty-above-all-else-doves-viral-ad-problem.html> (accessed November 2015).

[39] A recent example comes from the trendy department store H&M which used unacceptably thin models to show off its new "plus-size" collection. See Adams 2014.

[40] Tess Munster maintains a website: <http://www.tessholliday.com/>. Alex LaRosa is featured in this online essay by Marcy Cruz for *Plus Model Magazine:* "Sound Off: Is This Picture Too Curvy For Comfort?" January 4, 2014. <http://www.plus-model-mag.com/2014/01/plus-model-magazine-sound-off-is-this-picture-too-curvy-for-comfort/> (accessed November 2015).

[41] For a discussion of dropping the "plus size" category altogether, see Rebecca Adams 2014 and Beck 2014.

male-presenting fat bodies as well, and would aesthetically promote fat women in ways that do not rely on their sexuality; for instance, representations that entice us to find fat women to be witty, charismatic, confident, charming, stylish, strong, courageous, athletic, talented, and imbued with other traits that make a person attractive. A quick Internet search reveals that a handful of such things are cropping up; e.g. fat-positive yoga studios, fat mainstream comedians, fat pop-stars (think of Missy Elliott and Meghan Trainor, whose recent hit *All About That Bass* has sparked something of a national conversation about fat positivity), fashionable swimsuits designed specifically for fat bodies, and children's books that portray fat characters as likeable, interesting, and fun. I have been arguing that such aesthetic measures do not merely reflect changing attitudes about fat but, rather, are an integral mechanism of positive social change; in particular, they are part of a program of Aristotelian counter-habituation that aims to bend our collective taste in bodies in the direction of social justice.

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