

**FAT FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE REALITY TV SHOW “DANCE YOUR
ASS OFF”**

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Master's Thesis

English

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munication Studies

University of Jyväskylä

December 2021

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Suvi Räisänen	
Työn nimi – Title Fat female representation in the reality TV show ”Dance Your Ass Off”	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Maisterintutkielma
Aika – Month and year Joulukuu 2021	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 39
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma käsittelee lihavien naisten representaatioita. Tutkimuskysymyksenä on millaisia representaatioita lihavat naiskilpailijat rakentavat itselleen tosi tv-sarjassa <i>Dance Your Ass Off</i>. Tutkimusmenetelmänä on kriittinen diskurssianalyysi. Valitsin tutkimuskysymyksen, koska olen kiinnostunut siitä kuinka lihavat naiset puhuvat itsestään ja kehoistaan laihdutusohjelmadiskurssissa. Halusin selvittää kuinka he representoivat itsensä lihavana henkilönä ja millaisia representaatioita he rakentavat itsestään, kun he muistelevat ohjelmaa kauden viimeisessä jaksossa laihempana henkilönä. Tuloksissa paljastui kolme pääkategoriaa: regimentoitu eli hallittavissa oleva keho, pystyvä keho ja kaunis keho. Representaatioissa ilmeni kuinka laihdutusohjelmissa vallitseva diskurssi on ajatus lihavasta kehosta kehona jota tulee kontrolloida ja laihdutus on naisten henkilökohtainen haaste. Laihdutuksen jälkeinen keho koetaan pystyvämmäksi ja kauniimmaksi kuin ,lihava keho. Lihavuutta neutraalina ilmiönä kohtelevaa diskurssia ei ilmennyt, mutta halu neutraaliin tai positiivisempaan kehonkuvaan on nähtävissä uudemmassa lihavuustutkimuksessa. Jatkotutkimusehdotus on tarkastella kuinka laihdutus voi saada uskonnollisia piirteitä sekulaarissa kulttuurissa.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Representation, fat identity, critical discourse analysis, fat studies, reality tv	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	

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1 INTRODUCTION

The representation of fat female bodies in reality television is a worthwhile area of study because it highlights the marginalization and shaming of fat bodies. These phenomena can lead to a representation of fatness as an epidemic that needs to be medically treated and can be highlighted as a threat to economy. There are also other ways to perceive fat bodies, such as the capable body, regimented body and beautiful body. I examine these representations in this thesis and discuss whether things are different in reality television today. This topic is relevant because fat studies and Critical Discourse Analysis have the potential to change things in society. The study of the fat body as a project that can today achieve a form of religion in secular society is my suggestion for further research in the field of fat studies.

The main aim of this thesis is to examine the representations that the fat, female contestants create for themselves on the reality television show *Dance Your Ass Off*. The data for this study is the last episode of season one called *The Reunion*. The method of analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis. First, I transcribe the comments of female contestants. Next I search for emerging discourses that relate to fat representation. Then I categorize the what kinds of verbs, nouns and adjectives the female contestants use to describe themselves. Lastly, I analyze what these results reveal about the discourses and values present in a societal level.

I reflect what these discourses say about American society and its' values and power structures, especially their connection to the concept of fatness and the fat female body. This is achieved by examining the emerging discourses from the data and reflecting on what they reveal about the values and ideals and expectations we place on the female body and how we portray and view the concept of fatness. I have a final discussion about the concept of fatness within our society and how fat people are portrayed within the show. I concentrate on the fat female body and how it is constructed in society.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

My key concepts in this thesis include representation, fat identity and the concept of fatness. The theoretical background of this study is based on the work Harjunen (2018, 2019) on the representation of fat people and fat identity in the media. I rely on Fairclough's (1995, 2005, 2015) and Blommaert's (2005) research on discourse and representation. My method of research in this thesis is Critical Discourse Analysis. I study the emerging discourses as texts that reflect our societal values and ideologies. My interest is the fat female contestants and the ways in which they construct their experiences of fatness in the final episode of the reality TV show *Dance Your Ass Off*.

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough (2015:6-11) defines critical discourse analysis as a combination of critique of discourse and explanation how it affects social reality. Critical Discourse Analysis, or henceforth CDA starts the analysis by critiquing discourse and extends this critique to the current social reality. Essentially CDA seeks to explain how discourse and non-discursive elements relate to each other in societies and how one can understand the practices they create. In CDA it is crucial to understand that power on different societal levels "affect and are affected by discourse". Then CDA can help in changing society (Fairclough 2015:28). CDA examines how discourse is about unjustly exercising power over other groups. CDA seeks to initiate action to create a better reality (Fairclough 2015:48-49).

Blommaert (2005:26) states that as CDA analyzes the relationship of discourse and social structures, it shows how power is abused in society and enables people to change societal imbalances. The concept of discursive power is a crucial area of study in Critical Discourse Analysis. Blommaert (1995:219-222) notes that primarily discourse teaches and helps to transfer values and ideologies to others. Thus, language is used as a form of power, where the discourse users decide what is emphasized or left out of the conversation. Blommaert states (2005:2) that CDA should analyze the effects of power to individuals, communities, and society. He opines that power is about inequality in terms of who is and who is not included in societal conversations. Blommaert (2015:233) maintains that critical analysis of discourse must examine how discourse produces and upholds inequality in society.

Fairclough (2007:97-98) utilizes a three-dimensional model of discourse and method of discourse analysis. Discourse is a spoken or written language text, a practice of interpreting and producing text and a sociocultural practice on multiple levels of society. This three-part model consists of text analysis, processing analysis and social analysis. In other words, discourse consists of description, interpretation and explanation which form the basis of a critical analysis. Fairclough (1997:77) states that in CDA language is a product of society and simultaneously affects society. Fairclough (1995:268) analyzes text and language, text production and text and its larger societal meanings.

Fairclough (1995:2) describes power as the ability to control discourse by dominating the ideological bent of the conversation over an alternative view that differs from the maintained discourse. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009:41-46) state that discourse is social activity with consequences, one of which is power. Analysis is built on how the world and events are represented, what is the nature of their identity and relationship with each other. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen also discuss discursive power: what kinds of discourses are given prevalence and what kinds of discourses are not. Discourses that are close to individuals in some ways are often not questioned but taken for granted.

2.2 Representation

Pietikäinen and Mäntynen construe representation as how things are in the world. As they state (2009:41-44) discursive power is where language modifies, defines and challenges reality. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen reflect that discourse wields power by including and excluding things as they describe the world. They state that representation is about how phenomena are portrayed and who portrays them.

Owen (2015:1-6) examined the emerging representations of U.S. citizens about fatness through interviews. Owen demonstrates how fatness is portrayed through representation in the way it is discussed. Fat bodies are viewed simultaneously as erotic and horrific in their representation. Fat bodies are viewed as too big and scary, and fat people are condemned to not have enough willpower because their diets have failed. Fat people are a reminder that the dieting does not work for most people. Owen condenses representation's duality by stating that we" produce

our culture and are products of it". She continues that fat people are viewed as more closely tied to their biological processes. They are represented as dirty and gluttonous because of this pronounced and perceived connection to their biology. Owen also states (2015: 8–11) that fat people are represented as those who have escaped beauty standards. They are perceived simultaneously as ugly but free of the expectation to be beautiful in the eyes of society. Owen concludes that fat people lack a voice because it is drowned out by the representations of death and disease that surround them. Owen refers to the idea that fat people are absent from culture since the representations are few and far between. Culture associates the discourse of disease and death to fat people. Owen claims that fat people are represented as sites of ambivalence, where opposite facets are true at the same time. This ambivalence makes it possible to question what the representations are saying, how they are saying it and what is the alternative to them.

2.3 Fat studies

Fat studies (Fat Studies/ PCA/ACA 2021) is an interdisciplinary field of study that researches how body size is politicized throughout history and prescribed cultural meanings. Fat studies examines how fat bodies remake the world and are shaped by it. Fat studies critiques how the culture limits the fat body and aims to create paradigms to advance fat acceptance in mainstream culture. Fat studies maintains that fat identity is a worthwhile area of study within academia and as a media representation.

Harjunen (2018:113-114) states that studying fatness shows how the body produces the discourses of health and illness and how body characteristics derive meaning from their contemporary time and place. Fat studies examines fatness often through the lens of intersectionality and identity politics, where fat people share an experience of discrimination. Critical fat studies aim to show that the obesity epidemic-discourse that dominates the debates about fatness is about power and argue that fatness should be examined beyond the individual level. (Harjunen 2018:113-114.)

The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies (2020) gives an overview of the varied areas of research in fat studies. Fat studies explores, for example, how fat people are blamed for their fatness. Dark (2020:37-39) discusses the fact when one's Body Mass Index is over a certain threshold, one is linked with death. This threshold maintains that such a body is diseased

even though it is healthy and that numbers always indicate facts about health. It discusses causation as characteristic to the discourses about fatness. Fear and stress of fat stigma can influence the enjoyment of movement. Dark searches for neutrality in the knowledge that fat is stigmatized like other marginalized bodies are. She maintains that culture promotes conformity instead of health and that eschewing narratives can enable one to be a positive actor in one's health. Kyrölä (2020: 108,114) discusses the fact that reality television shows give a chance for fat bodies to be visible, when invisibility is the norm. She indicates that fat representation in the media is more varied now. Fatness is dangerous in the mainstream narrative and Kyrölä interjects that fat bodies can be viewed as normal.

Owen (2015:3-7) studied how fatness is seen as contradictory through the means of CDA. Owen refers to the idea that people can overcome fatness by using their will power, that is prevalent in American culture. Fat bodies are viewed as disgusting because they are linked to, for example eating and sweating more and they take up more space than a thinner person. Owen continues that fat bodies call into question what allotted space bodies are allowed to take in society and that people are expected to fit into public spaces meant for a specific size. This information can cause anger that is directed at fat bodies rather than questioning the spaces we are expected to occupy in society. Fat bodies occupy paradoxical spaces and represent excess appetite. People are taught to hate fat bodies yet simultaneously people find fat bodies appealing. Owen (2015:11) summarizes by stating that fat people can criticize "the definitions that their exclusion helps form and maintain".

Along with critical fat studies we have witnessed the rise of body-positive movement. Cameron (2018: 1-5) opines that due to the influence of the body-positive movement, reality television provides a platform for performing acceptable fatness. These kinds of shows produce archetypes of good and bad fat bodies. "The good, or acceptable, fat body is either fat because it is diseased, or remains fat despite proving itself to be physically active and healthy." Cameron shows that individual choices are deemed good or bad based on institutional influence. A body that exhibits self-love is not profitable for society. Capitalist economy profits from people's dissatisfaction with their bodies. These findings are similar to those of Raisborough (2014: 160-162) who shows that fatness is fixable by consumerism, personal effort, and expert help in the genre of reality television. The aim is to make the people choose healthy choices within the narrative of the show. Fatness is the cause of addiction and thinner bodies are

liberated from fat when they gain new energy after weight loss. The thinner body is deserving of consumerism.

Cameron notes that in body-positive television fat bodies provide opportunities where fatness is permitted, though fat stigma may still be present in the discourse. Cameron (2018:6-8,10) shows that *My Big Fat, Fabulous Life* constructs fatness as symptom to a disease that cannot be controlled but fat bodies can earn value by engaging in exercise and if they have a medical condition. Cameron's analysis shows that concern from family and community and medical expertise that is anti-fat is used as a way to control fat people in the show. On the surface *MBFFL* seemingly rejects established portrayals of fatness. In the end Whitney Way Thore is free of any responsibility because her illness makes weight loss very difficult, and the indication is that the real Whitney is trapped by her body. Whitney expresses a desire to lose weight to become a better dancer in her profession, essentially to control her fat body better. She also expresses joy in being a fat dancer and does not want to be obsessed with weight. These instances are fewer in number than the depictions to try and lose weight.

Cameron (2018: 11-15) cites that fat bodies need surveillance from authorities such as family and medical experts because they lie about their diet and cannot lose weight without guidance. Whitney is also encouraged to surveil herself and her choices with food in place of the medical experts. Cameron indicates that Whitney does resist the narratives of the show on personal social media and acknowledges the existence of good and bad fat archetypes. As Cameron concludes, in reality television fat bodies are portrayed to be in crisis, in order to turn viewers anxious about their weight and to avoid becoming fat.

Meadows and Bombak (2018:2-3,11) show that perceived exercise competence is affected by personal experiences and lack of positive fat role models. Low exercise self-efficacy means the fat active identity is thwarted. Meadows and Bombak conclude that fat people lack role models for physical activity in culture, which leads to low self-efficacy. Steele et al, (as quoted by Meadows and Bombak 2018:6) showed that fat people experience the stereotype threat. If they engage in exercise, they are likely to be judged based on negative fat stereotypes and they may reinforce them. Having repeated negative experiences while exercising does not cultivate an experience of physical capability. There is explicit and implicit weight stigma within the culture that affect willingness to exercise in public. All of this may prevent fat people from

engaging in physical activities. Critical fat studies also reveal the paradoxical nature of attitudes towards fat bodies. For example, in relation to sports and the requirement of losing weight, Harjunen argues (2019:11-12) that when exercising in public fat people “are socially and morally not in the place discursively designated for them as ambivalent as this place might be”. Harjunen concludes that fat people are considered to be a group that needs to exercise but they are simultaneously deemed to not look fit enough to do it, so they should already be a certain size before starting exercise.

Harjunen (2018:115-119) examines the concepts of medicalization and healthism and how they affect the fat experience. Conrad (2007, as quoted by Harjunen 2018:115) defines medicalization as a form of social control where characteristics that are defined as an illness multiply. Fatness is construed as a treatable illness. Medicalization provides medical solutions to problems that were previously not medical in nature. Crawford (1980, as quoted by Harjunen 2018:116) maintains that the individual is solely responsible for maintaining health and that health is the focus in life. Healthism makes the individual responsible for things they cannot control, and medicalization provides her multiple ways for improvement. Combination of these ideals makes the individual fit to be the ideal citizen who is cost-effective, productive, and responsible. Fat people do not live up to these ideals in the eyes of society. People who reject the label of being ill, call into question what sort of bodies are acceptable and how people can behave. This relates to acceptable choices and how society disciplines and rewards individuals based on their choices. In medical discourse that focuses on the illnesses linked to being overweight, fat bodies are constructed as a financial threat. Fat people are expensive for society, in addition to being viewed as immoral. Harjunen states that striving for a normal weight is tied to the idea of socially acceptable body who is morally virtuous.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA, AND METHODS

3.1 Research questions

My research questions focus on the concepts of the fat female body and their representations of fat females in the media, specifically in reality television discourses. My first research question is what kinds of representations the fat female contestants build for themselves during the course of the reality television show *Dance Your Ass off*. This research question is answered by examining the representations in the last episode of the first season as the contestants talk about their time on the show.

I chose this research question because I am interested in the way fat women and their bodies are represented in the personal speech of the fat contestants. I wanted to know how they represent themselves as fat persons and what kinds of representations they build for themselves as fat persons as they reflect on their journey in the final episode as a thinner person. I am also interested in the fat positive representations that occur in their discourses. My aim is to unveil the values and ideals that concern the weight and body of the female contestants and are inherent within the emerging discourses. I chose this topic because I feel it is important to examine the way in which an image of fat identity as something that needs to be regulated through weight loss is discursively constructed in society. I could have also chosen to compare the male and female fat representations with each other. I chose to narrow down my questions as they are because I feared the scope of the research would be too extensive with both genders included in the research.

3.2 Data

The show has two seasons, which each have 13 episodes. My data consists of one episode of the weight loss and reality TV show *Dance Your Ass Off*. It is the last episode of season one where the contestants sum up their experiences during their time on the show. The show is a combination of a reality weight loss show and dance show with male and female contestants who are fat. The amount of weight they have lost each week is determined through a weigh-in at the studio after the dance performances. The contestants are scored each week based on their

dance performance in different dance styles as well as the overall amount of weight lost during their week in the competition. These scores are added together and the contestant with least points is eliminated. I chose this episode because I want to conduct an in- depth analysis of the emerging identities, as opposed to a more general overview of the entire season and in my view the last episode offers a unique perspective to the season. The contestants perform one dance each week along with their professional dance partner, either a Latin number or a ballroom number.

The show was broadcast in Finland during the time from August 17th to October 26th, 2012, and reruns were also shown. The show proved to be popular, as a Finnish version was also produced and broadcast in Finland. My topic of research is specifically the American version of *Dance Your Ass Off* and I will not include the Finnish version in my analysis. I collected my data from August 17th to October 26th, 2012. Each season has 13 episodes in total and each run lasted 13 weeks. The data is the last episode of the first season called Reunion. The contestants gather to talk about their experience on the show and what has happened five months after it and their current life situation. The show had eight female contestants in its first season and the same number of male contestants. Alicia, Pinky, Mara, Tara, Karla, Shayla, Trice and Angela are all present in this episode. The host is Marissa Jaret Winokur.

The winner and runner-up have been announced in the previous episode, leaving more time for them and the other contestants to reflect on their journey as individuals and as a group. The host interviews the other contestants first and the winner and runner up are interviewed last and are given more time to reflect on their journey. The contestants are displayed on a screen in their underwear as they were measured at the start of the show. The total number of pounds that they have lost is displayed next to their image. The contestants enter the stage dancing.

The female contestant who has lost the most pounds is asked about her weight loss but the host does not state how much she has lost, like she did with the previous contestants. The host interviews the contestants by asking them about their time on the show. The contestants sit next to each other on a large sofa with a studio audience present and each contestant is given time to reflect on the question. Some contestants are given more airtime based on how their story relates to the narratives the show is aiming to create. Main narrative is the idea that weight loss improves one's life. The show interviews the winner and runner-up the most, followed by the

person who seemingly has experienced the most drastic change in her lifestyle. The host asks questions such as, “What’s been the biggest change you’ve seen”, “What are you most excited about now”, “How much weight have you lost and how many dress sizes have you dropped” and “What was it like, facing that scale for the first time”.

3.3 Selection and collection of data

I decided to choose the last episode as my data because I can narrow down my focus on the complete experience the female contestants have during the entire season. The contestants have had more time to reflect on their journey and all the changes it has brought into their lives. One can argue that researching representations after the contestants have become thin or thinner is not reflecting their experience as fat people adequately. They are viewing their fat experience after they became thinner and not during when they were fatter. One can also argue that they can reflect on both instances better after the show has ended. Participating in the show has given them a different experience of their bodies, thus changing them personally and within their community.

3.4 Analytical process

I employ Fairclough’s (2007:97-98) three-dimensional model of CDA. This three-part model consists of text analysis, processing analysis and social analysis or description, interpretation, and explanation of the discourse. In my analysis I analyzed the verbs, nouns, and adjectives each of the female contestants used to describe themselves. I study the verb, noun, and adjective choices of the female contestants as they reveal the most about the way the women view themselves as fat people (Table 1). Transitive vs. intransitive verb choices reveal whether the women portray themselves as active or passive participants (Table 2). Their adjective choices (Table 3) reveal whether they view themselves in a positive or negative way. I first categorized the nouns from the data. Next, I categorized the adjectives into positive and negative choices. Lastly, I categorized the verbs into transitive and intransitive verb categories. Categorization of the adjectives and nouns and preliminary observations based on the data led to the identification of three discourses that emerge from the data.

Table 1. *Verb, adjective and noun choices of the contestants*

<i>Contestants</i>	<i>Verb choices</i>	<i>Adjective choices</i>	<i>Noun choices</i>
Angela	was	cool, awesome	butt
Mara	did not feel, got out, showcased, could do, felt, was, can speak, think, felt, did not know, is, feel, can't get up	hard, old	an embarrassment, an empowerment, liberated, number one, that way, experience, lady
Karla	have, worked out, am	-	life, single
Tara	feel, ran, am not, go, not gonna be, quit, want, to look, realize, have to make, are not gonna be, was, wondering, was gonna get on board, don't live, is, have to incorporate, found, was, was, spend, making, figuring, am gonna cook, pack, don't have, go, know, am eating, is making, think, taught, don't have to survive, mean, have to cook, have to eat, have to be, think, was, am	good, easy, difficult, hasty, good, fresh, creative, good, busy	MILF, way, a quitter, home, kids, choices, life, family, people, house, key, success, planning, grocery list, lunch, day, decision, drive-thrus, times, difference, choices, meals, thing
Trice	can shop, have, want, working on, makes, know, know, was, was, to get, guess, did, accomplished, am, was, had to make, cleaned out, got, was, can't eat, led might have turned on, know, can't help, know	happy, hard, sexy	store, handbag, skinny jeans, booty shorts, in shape, an adjustment, closet, refrigerator, home, show

Alicia	know, am trying, doing, can do, can never be, comes off, am becoming, anna win, am doing, is, gonna, had, got to show, am, signed up, wanted to dance, learned, anticipated, need to understand, ate, know, was, was, was hiding, was, is, am sitting, feel	disappointed, better, weird, great, beautiful	weight, dancer, life, legs, pounds, dream, crap, detox, drug addict, the drugs, baby
Pinky	being, had, was, became, am learning, have, have, can be, was, got to dance, took, happened, lost, was, did, am dancing	same, close, awesome, angry, happy, little, little, biggest,	situation, each other, family, family, friends, potential, skill, half a pound, piece, week, chocolate, brother's free style group
Shayla	are having, am having, never expected to come, make, is, is, am eating, am, happened, was, am loving, is, is, am, am, did not expect to make, made, can't express, gave	same, lifelong, different, right, active, biggest, beautiful,	people, struggle, friend, life, night and day, things, change, perception, perception of my own beauty, body, toning, saying in shape, staying healthy, friends, this, life

Table 2. *Transitive and intransitive verbs*

<i>Contestants</i>	<i>Transitive verbs</i>	<i>Intransitive verbs</i>	<i>Transitive or intransitive verbs</i>
Angela	---	was	---
Mara	did not feed, showcased, could do, felt, think, felt, did not know, feel	got out, was, can speak, is, can't get up	---
Karla	---	have...worked out	---
Tara	want, to look, realize, must make, was going to get on board, must incorporate, found, making, figuring, pack, don't have, know, am eating, is making, think, taught, mean, must eat, think	wondering, ran, am not, go, are not going to be, are not gonna be, was, don't live, is, was, was, spend, am gonna cook, go, don't have to survive, must cook, must be, was, am	quit
Trice	have, makes, know, know, to get, did, accomplished, had to make, cleaned out, got, can't eat, know, can't help, know	can shop, want, was, was, am, was, was, might have turned on	working on, guess, led
Alicia	know, know, gonna, had, got to show, signed up, wanted to dance, learned, anticipated, need to understand, ate, know, was hiding, am sitting, feel	am, can never be, am becoming, is, am, was, was hiding, was, is	trying, doing, can do, comes off, anna win, trying, am doing
Pinky	being, had, became, am learning, have, have, took, lost, did	was, can be, was, happened, was	got to dance, am dancing,

Shayla	are having, am having, never expected to come, make, is, am eating, am loving, did not expect to make, made, can't express, gave	is, is, am, happened, was, is, am, am	
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Table 3. *Adjectives*

<i>Adjectives</i>
<i>Positive:</i> Cool, awesome, liberated, number one, better, good, fresh, creative, busy, happy, great, sexy, beautiful, awesome, so happy, different, right, more active, beautiful
<i>Negative:</i> Old, not easy, difficult, hasty, hard, so bad, weird, young, easy, easy, measured, easy, so good, ordinary

Positive adjectives in TABLE 3 are for the most part related to the life that comes after weight loss, specifically how the contestants' life have become better after they have lost the weight. The adjectives awesome, good, better, happy, and beautiful are all used twice within the data and are uttered by different people. Their lives are so different to what they were before and now they feel more active or happy. They are more creative with their meals and have to eat fresh.

Negative adjectives in TABLE 3 refer to how the competition is hard for the women and how they feel old in their bodies. Easy refers to the fact that making good choices with life is not always easy. Weird refers to the dream where contestant cannot believe she has lost that much weight. Hasty refer to the decisions they might make in drive-thru's.

My analysis of transitive and intransitive verbs was not relevant to my analysis; therefore, I will repeat any results. My choice in analyzing adjectives and nouns was more relevant for the topic. Thus, I will examine them instead.

Lastly, I noted down the nouns that had some similarities with each other or were repeated often in the speech of the women. Here I looked for any emerging discourses that I could find that related to the three main representations I had discovered in my analysis. I noted down my observations about these oft-repeated nouns and their relation to the most important representations. The most relevant nouns are the following:

Choices, quitter, decision, adjustment, dancer, dream, detox, drug addict, friends, potential, skill, struggle, beauty, body, friend, change.

One contestant talks about how she is making good choices and that she is not a quitter. This is relevant to the discourse of not giving up during the weight loss process and how fatness can be controlled by making good choices instead of bad choices in terms of food. The use of nouns like drug addict and detox in the same sentence indicates that they are closely related to the discourse of fatness being an addiction that can be overcome.

The contestants discuss the concepts of adjustment, struggle and change during their time on the show. Adjusting to their new life is difficult and staying thin has its' struggles as it is a

change to get used to this new kind of body and to the new habits they have adopted during the show. This is a discourse constructed by the show about fatness. It is presented as a personal struggle of the women.

They also discuss their potential and skills. These people have the potential to become better dancers through practice and weight loss and they have skills that are hidden by their fat or poor self-esteem. The contestants have this potential within them, relating to the discourse of a thin person trapped inside of a fat person waiting to get out and then reaching her full potential. This in turn relates to the discourse of starting to live the life they are meant to be living after they have lost the weight. These are also discourses that the show creates about the skills and potential of fat people.

The concept of choice and decision also occur multiple times. Fatness and being fat is a choice because becoming thin is a matter of choice. They do not discuss weight gain being the result of anything other than overeating and not exercising enough. The aspect of weight gain through medical reasons is not presented, so in that sense being fat is represented as a matter of individual life choice.

Finally, beauty and body are discussed repeatedly. The idea of one's body being beautiful and this beauty coming forth after weight loss is referenced by many contestants. Now that the body is thinner, it is perceived to be more beautiful. Previously this beauty was hidden by fatness and now it is more apparent to the contestant and to the audience. Underlining these themes is the idea that the women were not alone with their experiences, but they had each other and found friends or family on the show. Family is also referenced a few times when the women discuss their life at home or the changes they have made at home.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Overview of the analysis

I started my analysis by viewing the last episode of season one in its entirety and transcribed the female contestants' answers. I transferred their answers into a table and noted all the verbs, nouns, and adjectives they used. Next, I examined the data for any emerging representations that the contestants discussed in their answers. Then I looked for any commonalities and themes that were repeated across all the answers. Finally, I reflected on what these representations and themes reveal about our values and power structures within society, especially as they relate to the fat female body and fat representations.

The most important representations that emerged from the data through the detailed analysis of the language the contestants used to describe their experiences were the capable body, regimented body, and beautiful body. Capable body refers to a body that is able to perform the dance numbers while being fat. This representation evolves to signify a thinner body that is able to perform better than their fatter body. The contestants have more self-efficacy with their body.

Regimented body is a body that is under the control of the women through controlled eating and more exercise. The body is not controlled by an addiction to food but by the choices of the woman. The body is regimented through exercise.

The beautiful body is a body that is viewed as desirable, and it emerges after weight loss. This beautiful body is worthy of certain kinds of accessories and clothes. The beautiful body was hidden under the fat and now it is a reality.

4.2 Capable body

This is the representation of the physically skilled fat person. In this instance the capable bodied person is framed as capable in physical activity despite being fat or more capable after losing weight. Some of the contestants view their body as being capable while being fat and some

view themselves as being more capable as they lose weight. Capable body does not refer to able or disabled bodies in this representation.

Examples

For Mara the competition has made her feel liberated because the contestants could prove their dancing skills. Mara was not ashamed of her fatness, rather she was glad she could prove that fat people can perform equally well as thinner people. She uses the words *empowerment* and *liberation* when she talks about the opportunity to dance as a fat person. She thinks this feeling of being liberated extends to all the contestants. She is an example of the discourse of a capable-bodied fat person, and she also views her fellow contestants similarly. They have proven this by entering the competition and succeeding in it. Mara seems to be saying that the show has given her a new opportunity to showcase her abilities. Mara did not feel embarrassed by her failures, rather she views the entire experience as a positive experience.

- (1) But I didn't feel like it was an embarrassment, it was an empowerment. Every time we... got out there and showcased what we could do, I just felt liberated like I was number one and I can... speak for everyone, I think we all felt that way.

The viewers view fat people and see them succeed. Fat viewers may see it as a relief and joy to see positive representations of a peer. Fat people and especially fat women are erased from popular culture and rarely portrayed as succeeding in their endeavors. Thus, the show presents an opportunity for fat women to have their voices heard and more importantly to have their bodies shown on television. For some it may be an opportunity to examine their views of fat bodies, to see if their views are derogatory or positive.

Mara also says she felt "*like an old lady*", meaning an old lady and she are similar in their states of movement when she has trouble moving after the amount of exercise they have done on the show. This comment does not mean her discourse of a capable-bodied fat person is not still a reality. She merely indicates that the amount of exercise she has done during the competition was strenuous. Mara states that she did not feel embarrassed rather she felt empowered on the show as she showcased her skills. She says she felt like number one on the show, thus she proved she has a capable body. She views herself as an active participant in the competition. She felt like number one because her body could perform well.

Another contestant, Pinky, previously felt she could not participate in her brother's dance crew before she had lost some weight. She is a skilled dancer and is aware that fat people can be skillful in the field of dance. Winning the competition became less important for her and she was simply happy to dance during the final round. This may be related to the fact that she is proud of the skills she has found anew and enjoyed displaying them again. She uses the adjectives *awesome* and *happy* when she talks about herself. She refers to herself as having potential and skill as a dancer. She is happy because she has proved with her dancing skills that she is able-bodied both as a fat person and after losing weight.

- (2) I'm learning that I have potential, that I have skill, and that I can be awesome. That half a pound, I thought I was gonna a little bit more angry at myself for it but I was just so happy that I got to dance that one, that one last time.

One might argue the prevailing discourse is that the ladies have all this untapped potential and skill that is hidden by their fat, like a thin person trapped inside of a fat person waiting to get out to start to live her life more fully. Weight loss is connected very closely to being more able-bodied, it is almost as if one cannot exist without the other. It seems that skill becomes only apparent after the weight loss, meaning the contestants feel they gain back their skills only after losing weight. It is almost like their dancing skills are hidden behind their fat. They can be "awesome" and have "potential". The idea of a skilled fat dancer is not possible until a contestant has lost weight. Alicia states that "*The more weight comes off, the better dancer I'm becoming*", meaning the weight loss has made her body a more capable body. She has been disappointed in her body before, but the show has given her a new incentive to keep her body thin.

- (3) *As long as I know I'm trying my hardest and doing everything I possibly can do then I can never be disappointed in myself ever again*".

Summary

The capable-bodied person can at the same time succeed in the contest while being fat and can succeed better after she has lost weight. The women can prove that fat people are good dancers, and they have a platform to show fat bodies on television. For Mara this discourse is

extended to all her fellow contestants, meaning she views all of them as capable bodied fat people who can perform well during the dance numbers despite being fat.

This contrasts with the representation of a more capable bodied fat person after they become thinner, meaning they begin to master their bodies better when they become thinner. Alicia states that she becomes more capable in dance as she loses weight and not while being fat. She agreed to do the show because she wanted to dance but does not extrapolate in this episode if she thought she was a skilled dancer when she was fatter.

Pinky's comments seem to suggest she viewed her weight as an obstacle for dancing in the past. She knows that fat people can be skilled dancers and in fact she is one herself. She could show her skills during the contest and prove her ability as a dancer. Pinky seems to operate in two discourses simultaneously. She had skill before when she was fatter, but her skill becomes more apparent as she loses weight. She was happy to enjoy dancing again and found a new appreciation for her skills as a dancer.

4.3 Regimented body

In this representation the fat person is perceived to have lost their self-control in life and has regained it during her time on the show. Their body has become highly regimented by them and the show. If this self-control is lost, the fat person will reappear. The show seeks to control the contestants' bodies through diet and exercise to achieve results. Ultimately the contestants seek to control their bodies after they leave the show.

Alicia compares herself to *a drug addict* and feels her fatness is something she could not control before she came on the show, like it was an *addiction* to food. She can now be at ease because she has conquered her fatness and feels beautiful on the outside. The contest has been a way for her to conquer her addiction and she feels this is true for the other contestants as well. She assumes everyone is fat because they are not eating healthy and are addicted to food. This is the only reason someone could be fat or remain fat in her view. Alicia summarizes her view:

- (3) As long as I know I'm trying my hardest and doing everything I possibly can do then I can never be disappointed in myself ever again.

- (4) What you need to understand is...all of us, we ate like crap before, you know? And it was like a detox. Like if- I was like a drug, a drug addict, coming off the drugs.

Alicia says the competition was like *a detox*, meaning participating has been a process of purification from unhealthy habits for everybody. She also says that she was like *a drug addict* coming off the drugs, meaning she compares having a drug addiction with having an addiction for food. In her view the contestants have come to detox themselves on the show.

Her partner and the experts pushed her farther in her weight loss attempts when she was already trying her best and suffered from the shakes because of it. One can see the need to regiment the body to a more extreme level in these kinds of shows. Alicia takes the show very seriously but that is not enough for the experts and her partner.

- (5) Like I would go to bed with the shakes at night, you knew and then I'd get pushed by Lee at the gym and I'd get my partner Ittalo at dance rehearsal going "You think is just like fun and games" and I'd be like, "I guess not".

Alicia uses nouns like drug addict, drugs, pounds to show that she was out of control with her eating before she came on the show. The show was a detox for her and helped her regiment her body better.

Trice comments that her loss of control around food led her on the show:

- (6) It was hard; I had to make an adjustment. I cleaned out my refrigerator when I got home. I was like; I can't eat that anymore because that's what led me on the show.

Her body must be regimented through changes in her eating habits. She fears that she will regain her weight if she continues the way before she came on the show. Here she indicates she was not in control of her body's size. Trice maintains that she lost control around food and that is why she was fat before the show. Since she started regimenting her body on the show and after it, she was more successful with weight loss. Trice talks about skinny jeans, booty shorts and handbags as prizes for her new regimented body. She has controlled herself and these nouns represent she can have or will be able to have control in the future.

The regimented body is present in Tara's comment on how she does not want to be viewed as a quitter in terms of her weight loss. This can be interpreted to mean that fatness is a choice and is directly related to quitting a healthy diet and exercise. The show does not refer to medical discourse in this particular episode or the threat that weight might pose to their health.

Tara is ultimately stating that she cannot be blamed for her fatness because she is working hard to keep the weight off. This can mean she views fat people as quitters and seems to think that quitting is the reason, she herself would remain fat. She views being fat as a hindrance, something that she has moved on from and does not ever want to experience it again. She views being thinner as a commitment to her family.

- (7) I'm not a quitter, If I go home, it's not gonna be because I quit.: I want ma kids to look at me and realize that you have to make good choices in life, and they are not always gonna be easy. It was difficult but... worth it.

She keeps making *good choices* and that is why she succeeded in her weight loss and can control her fatness. If she lost control, she might regain the weight she has lost. If she did not do the things, she "*Has to do like eat fresh, be creative with meals*" she seems to think that would make her fat again. She has finally regained control of her fatness through careful planning, commitment and controlling her desires to eat certain foods. She seems to think that the life of the contestants was simply about surviving on unhealthy food. Fatness is reduced into a simple "calories in, calories out"-approach, meaning being fat is about losing control around food.

- (8) I really found what was my key to success was planning. I spend, like, two hours every single Sunday doing my grocery list, figuring out what I'm gonna cook and I pack my lunch every single day, so I don't have a hasty decision and go through drive-thrus. I know what I'm eating at all times. The difference is making good choices. I think that taught all of us that you don't have to survive on that. I mean, you have to cook, you have to eat fresh, and you have to be creative with your meals. And I think it was a good thing for all of us.

Her life is regimented in terms of meals, so she knows what she is *eating at all times*. She might make a *hasty decision and go through drive-thrus* if she did not take precautions. This seems to indicate she is afraid she will lose control around food if she resorts to fast food again. Essentially planning helps her maintain control in her life after the show. Tara talks about:

- (9) making good choices with regards to one's diet is not always going to be easy and how the show was not easy but worth it.
- (10) At the same time, once I stepped off, I knew okay that's where I was, I'm never gonna be there again, I'm moving forward.

Tara is regimenting her body and decides that she is not going back to her previous weight. Through regimenting her body, she is starting a new life i.e., *moving forward*. This relates to the idea that she is starting a new life as a thin person.

Summary

A regimented body is a body that has developed an addiction or has lost control around food. This body needs to be detoxed from the addiction and control must be gained by regimenting one's food choices. Tara regiments her body through careful planning every week and good food choices. She is not willing to give up on having a different body, so she regiments in order to avoid failure in her own eyes and others. She seems to view regimenting as the only solution to help with perceived loss of control around food and exercise.

They have achieved a more beautiful body because they have regimented their body. This appears to imply that the women were lacking in self-discipline when they were fatter. Regimented and beautiful bodies seem to be linked with one another. Beauty is constructed to be the striving force of the contestants and this competition is not so much about health.

4.4 Beautiful body

This representation relates to primarily thin bodies as beautiful bodies which is what the contestants strive to achieve. This body is achieved through hard work and is rarely viewed as beautiful before weight loss. There are some exceptions to this. The show seems to view women as desirable only after they have lost the weight and if desire is talked about in relation to a bigger size, it is made light of by the contestant and by others.

Examples

Trice seems to embrace her sex appeal and make light of it at the same time. Perhaps having sex appeal is not excluded from the experience of fatness in her mind, though people joke about the relationship of her and her dance partner. She felt sexy even in her previous size, referring

to her dance partner enjoying her curves. It is unclear if the idea of someone being attracted to her curves is treated as a joke or a legitimate preference.

(11) Yeah, I might have turned Jheseus on just a tad bit. I know, I can't help it I am sexy you know.

Trice feels she must be a certain size to wear tighter and more revealing clothes. It is not clear in this comment whether she determines the right size herself or if society does that for her. Trice says that *having my abs as tight as my weave* was the best part about participating on the show. She is comparing the tightness of her abs to the tightness of her hair piece, meaning she is in very good shape.

She talks about being able to choose any handbag she wants, while surely buying a handbag is not related to her size in any way. She may be using it as a means of reward for her weight loss in this instance.

(12) I can shop at any store and have any handbag I want" ... Skinny jeans, booty shorts, still working on that".

These comments relate to the idea that fat people can only do certain things after they have lost weight. The discourse of the fat person who will be happy only after she has become thin is very ingrained in the contestants. This kind of fat person is entitled to tighter clothes and nicer accessories. These things must be earned through weight loss. This fat person is only beautiful after she becomes thinner and then she is entitled to have beautiful or sexy things for her beautiful new body.

Angela expresses a positive opinion of her butt. It has been a plus for her to see her butt in the poster for the show. It may be that she is not referring to her butt in this sentence. She presumably likes the fact that her picture was on the poster, i.e., her as a person and not just a body part. She may have come to accept her body during the competition. Angela views the visibility of fat people as a positive phenomenon.

(13) My butt was plastered everywhere. It was like butt, butt, butt. It was so cool. It was awesome, it was awesome.

The idea of one's body being beautiful and this beauty coming forth after weight loss is very apparent in the speech of the contestants. Positive adjectives are for the most part related to the life that comes after weight loss, specifically how the contestants' lives have become better after they have lost the weight.

Fatness and being fat is viewed as a choice because becoming thin is viewed as a matter of choice. Weight gain is only discussed because of eating too much and not exercising enough. The aspect of weight gain through medical reasons is not presented. It is almost like the female body is a constant project that needs to be shaped for its beauty to come forth. The only accepted body is a thin body or at least a body that is striving to be thinner. This body's beauty is achieved through and brought forth by weight loss and seemingly there are no other options.

Fat people are seen as potential thin people, who have been imprisoned by their fat and are only now able to let go of their fat because of the show. They can only become fully accepted after they have lost the weight and conformed to society's idea of an acceptable body. Karla is an exception to the idea of a lonely and unhappy fat person who is single. She seems content with being single even though others seem to think of it as a negative issue. She simply states I am still single. The discourse of a fat, single female who is happy with herself seems to be an anomaly.

Alicia has let go of her previous life and can finally feel beautiful now that the thin person inside her has emerged. This in turn relates to discourse of when I am thin, I can finally live the life I am meant to be living.

(14) I was hiding, I was hiding since the time I was a baby. And this is the first time I'm sitting here, and I truly feel beautiful inside and out. I've lost ninety pounds. It's like a weird dream, I'm like oh great. I signed up for it because I wanted to dance so ah, but I learned so much more than I ever anticipated.

Alicia feels that after this weight loss, it is the first time when, she truly feels beautiful inside and out. She states she has *got to show my legs out*. Here she is most likely referring to the fact that she feels her legs are more beautiful after the weight loss.

Shayla feels like the show and essentially her weight loss has given her back the life she had lost. It is only after the show and weight loss that she can fully view herself as beautiful. She says, “*I am beautiful the way I am*”, possibly meaning she did not feel this way when she was fatter, that she did not consider herself to be beautiful before. On the other hand, she also says that exercise is not about weight loss but it’s about *toning, staying in shape, staying healthy* so she is more concerned about overall health than about beauty.

(15) My life is completely different; it’s like night and day. Now I’m eating the right things. I’m a lot more active. The biggest change that happened was my perception of working out. As well as my perception of my own beauty. I’m loving my body right now, I’m loving it and it’s about toning, staying in shape, staying healthy, that’s what it’s about, so. I’m beautiful, the way I am. And I can’t express enough how much this show gave me my life back.

She talks about how the perception of her own beauty has changed for her. This presumably means she views herself as more beautiful after the weight loss. She also talks about how her boyfriend was excited about her different physique. Her boyfriend deemed her body to be beautiful as well.

(16) When I first came home, Brandon was so excited, he couldn’t stop looking at my body.

The host reminds Tara that she said she wanted to feel like a MILF after her weight loss. Tara replies in the affirmative, meaning she does feel more desirable after her weight loss.

(17) I feel like a capital MILF.

Summary

A beautiful body is presented primarily as a thinner body in the competition. A sexual fat body is treated as a slight joke, but the possible attraction is still acknowledged at least. A thinner body is viewed as something that deserves tighter clothing and accessories because it is thin. They are the prizes one cannot have before an acceptable level of fatness is achieved.

The beautiful body has been trapped by the fat body and presumably it is waiting to get out once the contestant is thinner. The inside and outside of the person are viewed as equally beautiful after weight loss and it is acceptable to show this new body more, whereas earlier that might have been frowned upon when the contestants were fatter. One could say that becoming beautiful on the outside is a choice that the contestants have rejected or not achieved previously in their lives.

5 DISCUSSION

The genre of reality television has seen a significant amount of growth this decade. Along with it, fat studies has evolved as a field of study. Thus, fat studies is able to examine and question the values and representations present in the discourse of reality television. Extensive research has been conducted in relation to these phenomena, but further research is still needed on the topic of fat representations in reality television and how or if indeed they have changed since fat studies started as a field. This research addresses questions that are important for fat people and the position of fatness in society as fat studies evolves as a field and fat acceptance seeks to neutralize fatness to be one representation among all the other bodies.

The main aim of this thesis was to study the representations that the fat, female contestants create for themselves on the reality television show *Dance Your Ass Off*. The data for this study is the last episode of season one called The Reunion. The method of analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis. First I transcribed the comments of female contestants. Next I searched for emerging discourses that relate to fat representation. Then I categorized what kinds of verbs and nouns and adjectives the female contestants used to describe themselves. Lastly, I analyzed what these results reveal about the discourses and values present in a societal level.

Summary of my key findings of this thesis are that in the data there are three representations that emerged. These are the capable body, the regimented body, and the beautiful body. The capable body is a physically capable body that can perform the dance routines well. The contestants gain (1) more self-efficacy during their time on the show and experience a more capable body because of this. Some contestants feel that they became more capable after they lost weight during the show. Others feel happy to prove that fat people can perform well despite their body size. (2) Fat people are skilled while they are fat and after they become thinner in the discourse of some contestants. Some contestants (14) view thinner people as more skilled physically and seem to view fat people as being trapped by their fat. Thus, their skills are showcased better after their weight loss.

The regimented body is a body that is under the control of the contestant. They gain this control back during their time on the show through diet and exercise. The fear is that they will lose their control after the show and thus their bodies are very regimented. In this representation fat

people lose control of their body and become fat solely because of their loss of control around food and exercise choices. Fat people must regain this control through regimenting their bodies. This discourse reduces fat people to food addicts, and the assumption seems to be that all fat people suffer from this similar addiction.

The beautiful body is more desirable after weight loss (14). One contestant views an accessory as a reward for her weight loss and feels like she must be a certain size in order to wear certain pieces of clothing. Another contestant (17) wants to feel sexually desirable and maintains she succeeds in it only after her weight loss. The winner says she does not feel like she is hiding behind her fat anymore and after her weight loss she feels beautiful. Another contestant states that she loves her beautiful body now and so does her partner love it even more now (14). One contestant (11) acknowledges that she was desirable to her dancing partner during her time on the show and another views the fact that her butt was plastered on billboards as a positive (13). These instances show that there is some room for a more positive representation of a beautiful fat person during the show. Primarily a fat body is viewed as more acceptable when it becomes thinner or strives to become thinner. The beautiful body is waiting inside the fatter body to be released. The concept of being beautiful is mainly tied to being desirable.

My research contributes to the field in fat studies by showing that fat bodies are viewed in terms of desirableness, efficiency and by contrasting these monikers with thinner bodies. I examine the individual experience of the contestants and see what the available representations in the eyes of the culture are. The choice to concentrate on the way the women describe the different bodies enables one to study the representations effectively.

The show embodies the structure of a weight loss reality show that Raisborough (2014: 160-162) outlines in her research. It shows that fatness is fixable by consumerism, personal effort, and expert help. Fatness is the cause of addiction in Alicia's comment (4) and thinner bodies are liberated from fat. This thinner body is deserving of consumerism as is evident in comment (12) by Trice.

Owen 2015(1-11) states that fat people are seen as horrific and erotic at the same time. In the final episode fat bodies are not really discussed as horrific but the women refer to being desirable especially after losing weight. Owen also refers to the idea that fat people do not have

enough willpower. This is evident in the emphasis the show places on willpower as a tool in conquering fatness. Owen observes that fat people can escape beauty standards but, in my data, this is not the case. They actively embrace the beauty standards, although the discourse of capable body is present while the body is fatter and thinner.

As in Harjunen's (2018:115-119) findings healthism provides fat people multiple options for weight loss during the show. One contestant says that she is making good choices with regards to her food, and another emphasizes that if she just tries hard enough, she will never be disappointed in herself ever again. Like in Harjunen's research, the women have become more cost-effective, efficient, and more morally virtuous during the show because their bodies are not deemed fat and ill anymore. They are not a financial threat to society anymore and become more morally virtuous. The episode did not discuss the threat that weight might pose to their health. This was more of an underlying discourse that was not openly discussed but seems to be underlying talk about health and addiction.

My research focuses on the individual experience of the contestants after they have lost weight on reality television. Cameron's research (2018:3-6) supports my thesis by showcasing that fat people are still categorized by their size, but they are actively working on and working out to become thinner. This makes it acceptable to be fat in the context of the show and the contestants are being "good fatties". Unlike Cameron's research, my data of a single episode does not discuss the possibility of being fat because of an illness. There is hardly any discussion in this episode about positive portrayals of fatness. One contestant in particular talks about "making good choices" and working hard to achieve her new body. This relates to Cameron's result that engaging in exercise is emphasized. Familial concern is not really emphasized in the last episode like it was in Cameron's data but one mother (7) talks wanting to be a good example for her kids. Cameron (2008:11-15) suggests that fat people cannot be trusted to be truthful about their health and need authorities like family and experts to monitor them. The assumption is that fat people should monitor their food choices without external authorities. In my data the contestants do self-monitor themselves to make food choices that are deemed healthier. They discuss that this show and making different choices require planning and is not easy, but they want to do this for themselves.

This show does provide a platform for fat people to engage in exercise and puts fat people in tighter dance costumes. The women are perhaps viewed as acceptable to be in revealing clothing because they are engaging in weight loss while they do so. Reality television can provide these role models and in turn provide opportunities for more positive fat identities. As per Meadows and Bombak (2018:2-3,11), there are instances of low self-efficacy regarding exercise. There is also evidence that the women experienced an improved exercise efficacy at different weights. One contestant shows in comment (2) that she knew she was skilled before the show and gained more confidence when she re-familiarized herself with dancing. Another contestant discusses how they all became a family. I would argue that they became each other's role models in exercise and thus empowered each other in their shared endeavor to become thinner. Dark (2020:37-39) discusses that when one's Body Mass Index is over a certain threshold, this kind of fat is linked with death, and it is diseased even though there is no apparent illness involved. Fear and stress of fat stigma can influence the enjoyment of movement and Dark's data ties in with Meadows and Bombak and their results with low exercise self-efficacy.

Dark searches for neutrality in the fact that many bodies are stigmatized, and fat bodies are one such category. She maintains that culture promotes conformity instead of health and that eschewing narratives can enable one to be a positive actor in one's health. Kyrölä (2020: 108,114) discusses the fact that reality television shows give a chance for fat bodies to be visible. She indicates that fat representation in media is more varied than in previous decades. This is certainly true for my data since there is such a large gap between my research and the current research. Fatness is dangerous in the mainstream narrative and Kyrölä interjects that fat bodies can be viewed as normal. This does not seem to be the case in the genre of reality television as of yet. *My Big, Fat, Fabulous Life* is portraying its' protagonist (2018:6-8,10).as worthy of value when she engages in exercise and because her illness makes losing weight challenging. In this particular show fatness is still an illness that is beyond control, although Whitney Way Thore is trying to still control her body. *MBFFL* seemingly rejects more negative portrayals of fatness but ultimately the protagonist is trapped by her body. The genre seemingly will not allow for positive portrayals of fatness, although there are quite a number of years between *Dance Your Ass Off* and *My Big, Fat Fabulous Life*. Whitney expresses joy in being a fat dancer similarly to Pinky in my data, but more positive portrayals are not present in this genre. Angela's positive comment about her butt(13) is the exception in my data.

The adjective choices revealed that positive adjectives are related to how the contestants' lives have become better after they have lost the weight. Their lives are so different to what they were before and now they feel happy. Life after the show looks to be different in terms of food choices and how they view their bodies. Negative adjectives refer to how the competition is hard for the women, but it has been worth it. They have to make harder choices in life than before their weight loss. Negative adjectives refer to their life before the show and weight loss. Positive choices refer to their current life that is better after the weight loss. There is a distinct difference between their life before the show and after the show, which is evident with the representations in the data that I discuss.

The noun choices of the women support the representations that emerged from the data. Weight loss is presented as a choice that is very hard, but the discourse of the show is that it is a personal struggle for the women. The women have skill and potential that is brought forth after their weight loss and the outcome is a more capable body. This beautiful body is the result of their hard work, and it is no longer hidden by their fatness. This discourse here is that fatness can be overcome and the result of that is a better body, as well as ultimately a better life.

My choice to study transitive and intransitive verbs shows what did not work within the analysis. The verb choices indicated if someone was an active participant in their speech or not. My area of analysis is personal experience and self-image, and verb analysis is not the optimal choice. The emerging representations are apparent in the way the contestants talk about their bodies at the end of the final episode of the first season.

A suggestion for further research is to examine how the body can achieve a spiritual level for some people in a secular world. I think exercise gives some people a sort of spiritual purpose if they are lacking meaning and this can be traced to the idea of the body as a temple. This kind of discourse started to emerge from the data, as the contestants discuss how fervently they aimed to achieve a thinner body. An exercise routine can achieve almost religious qualities; thus, exercise and weight loss can take the place of a spiritual experience in our secular society. It seems that the body is something to be controlled in order to live a longer life. If the body can be contained and kept healthy, then is it possible to delay death.

Fat people are seen as underachievers who have been imprisoned by their fat and are only now able to let go of their fat because of the show. They cannot control themselves and their fatness is compared to a form of addiction, specifically an addiction to food. They can only become more accepted by society after they have lost weight. Fat people remind others of their mortality and the possibility of diseases, as per Dark's (2021:37-39) findings. These thoughts make people uncomfortable when they see fat people in the media. Especially fat people who remain fat bring out discomfort in people.

A challenge in this research initially was that there did not seem to be any practical or theoretical applications. On the other hand, one must remember that a result that confirms the original result is still a valid result. Critical fat studies and Critical Discourse Analysis present papers about fat discrimination. It is crucial to note what the study of the celebration of thinness in shows like this can reveal about the ways in which fat bodies are constructed as undesirable and therefore objects of discrimination and rejection in society.

One can also question my decision to study the female contestants only after they have completed the competition. The experience is not "my experience as a fat person", it is "my experience after having been a fat person". On the other hand, they are removed from the experience in some sense and are still living the experience both physically and mentally. Thus, it seems ideal to study them at this point in their experience. Many of them are thinner after the competition; therefore, they are viewing their former fatness from a different viewpoint. I considered this aspect of the research and I feel that my choice is justified. The contestants can view their entire journey in the reunion episode. They can compare their experiences as a fatter person and as a thinner person and draw conclusions on the differences on the projections of them as a fat person.

During the *Reunion* episode it is important that they build a certain kind of narrative for the contestants' after they exit the show. Struggles with weight loss or gain can be portrayed but there must always be a hopeful ending to these struggles. Any serious struggles may be diminished because the show wants to portray losing weight as easier than it looks with the help of the trainers, dietitians, and doctors. Rather, losing weight is portrayed as a personal struggle and still all the members of the crew in the background are needed. The show must be portrayed as an answer to the problems that the contestants face with their weight and in their life before

they have come on the show. The editors piece the show together in the editing room and essentially build the representations that the show wishes to portray to the audience which means there is seldom room for different kinds of portrayals. The representations need to be consistent throughout, even though they may not be accurate portrayals. Essentially this means that when one analyzes the representations of the contestants, one is analyzing the way the show wishes to portray them. The show utilizes brash language in its choice of *Dance Your Ass Off* as its' name. This is a deliberate choice to provoke the viewer and to produce a succinct image of the purpose of the show.

The likelihood of a happy fat person seems to be a paradox on the show. The idea that someone could be healthy and happy as a fat person is not perceived to be likely. Being thinner is meant to mean that one is also automatically healthier. Each contestant wants to lose weight and move away from their current fat representation into a more acceptable one.

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