



JYU DISSERTATIONS 667

Anna Puhakka

**Resistances in online body
positivity activism in Finland
in the late 2010s**

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ABSTRACT

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This doctoral dissertation investigates resistances in online body positivity activism in Finland in the latter half of the 2010s. In this work, body positivity activism entails deliberate actions aiming to end the systemic discrimination against fat people. The thesis' main focus is on the different resistances taking place in the online body positivity activist movement in Finland: extra-movement, intra-movement, and intrapersonal. In addition, I carry out a cross-cultural comparison of the resistances in the Finnish body positivity activist arena and those in a non-Finnish one, represented by a Danish stand-up comedian and fat activist Sofie Hagen.

The dissertation is based on online activist content – columns, blog posts, YouTube videos, podcasts, and Facebook posts – created in 2015–2020. To scrutinize the different resistances, I apply multiple case study methodology. In terms of theory, this dissertation draws from fat studies, gender studies, and queer studies. I employ several methods of data analysis: qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis and discursive strategies, reparative reading, as well as dialogic thematic analysis.

The results of this study shed light on the aforementioned three types of resistance. First, extra-movement resistance (directed at those who are not body positivity activists) occurs mainly through four discursive strategies: confrontation, instruction, seeking harmony, and introspection. Second, meaning negotiations and resistance also happen inside the movement, that is, among body positivity activists themselves. Issues such as intersectionality and intra-movement marginalization are brought to the fore. Third, intrapersonal resistance takes place as well, which means that activists experience ambivalence regarding their position, on one hand, as human rights advocates and, on the other hand, as persons who recognize the societal pressure (and a personal wish) not to be fat. Finally, cross-cultural convergences between the Finnish and non-Finnish resistances exist, yet they appear in varying degrees in the activists' work.

Keywords: fatness, body positivity, fat activism, online activism, resistance, gender, intersectionality, fat studies

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Puhakka, Anna

Vastarinnan muodot suomalaisessa verkkopohjaisessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismissa 2010-luvun jälkipuoliskolla

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Tässä väitöskirjatutkimuksessa tarkastellaan vastarintaa suomalaisessa verkkopohjaisessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismissa 2010-luvun jälkipuolella. Tutkimuksessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismi ymmärretään tarkoitukselliseksi teoksi, joiden päämääränä on lopettaa lihavien ihmisten järjestelmällinen syrjintä. Tarkastelun pääkohteena on suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismiliikkehdinnässä esiintyvä vastarinta, mutta työssä vertaillaan myös suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismissa ilmenevää vastarintaa sekä tanskalaisen lihavuusaktivistin Sofie Hagenin aktivismissa ilmenevää vastarintaa.

Väitöskirjatutkimuksen teoreettinen tausta sijoittuu yhteiskuntatieteellisen lihavuustutkimuksen, sukupuolentutkimuksen ja queer-tutkimuksen alueille. Monitapaustutkimus perustuu vuosina 2015–2020 internetissä julkaistuihin, aktivistien tuottamaan aineistoon: kolumneihin, blogikirjoituksiin, YouTube-videoihin, podcasteihin ja Facebook-julkaisuihin. Tutkimusaineiston analyysissä käytetyt menetelmät ovat laadullinen sisällönanalyysi, diskurssianalyysi ja diskursiiviset strategiat, korjaava luenta sekä dialoginen tematisointi.

Tutkimus tuottaa tietoa kolmesta vastarinnan muodosta suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismissa. Liikkeen ulkopuolinen vastarinta, joka nimensä mukaisesti suuntautuu ei-kehopositiivisuusaktivistisia tahoja kohtaan, tapahtuu pääasiassa neljällä eri tavalla. Niitä ovat konfrontaatio, opastus, sopusoinnun tavoittelu ja introspektio. Vastarintaa on lisäksi liikkeen sisäistä, eli kehopositiivisuusaktivistit käyvät merkityskamppailuja myös keskenään liikkeen perusteista sekä siitä, kuka saa siellä äänensä kuuluviin. Kolmanneksi kehopositiivisuusaktivismiin piirissä tapahtuu henkilökohtaista vastarintaa: aktivistit kokevat ambivalenssia eli ristiriitaisia tunteita lihavuutta kohtaan. Yhtäältä he toimivat lihavien ihmisten oikeuksien puolesta, toisaalta he tuntevat painetta olla hoikkia. Suomalaisen ja ei-suomalaisen vastarinnan vertailussa puolestaan ilmenee, että niissä on kyllä yhteneväisyyksiä, mutta ne ilmenevät eri tavoin ja erivahvuisesti aktivistien työssä.

Avainsanat: lihavuus, kehopositiivisuus, lihavuusaktivismi, verkkoaktivismi, vastarinta, sukupuoli, intersektionaalisuus, yhteiskuntatieteellinen lihavuustutkimus

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Helsinki, June 29, 2023

Anna Puhakka

TABLES

TABLE 1	Tovar's (2017) levels of fatphobia, my modification of these levels into types of resistance, their adaptation into research questions, and their connection to the original articles.....	19
TABLE 2	Main online research material in alphabetical order	36
TABLE 3	Methods of analysis used in the original publications	43
TABLE 4	Research questions and the main answers to the research questions (main findings; main contributions to the dissertation).....	76

LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

I

Puhakka, A. (2019a). Suomalaisten kehopositiivisuusaktivistien vastineet kehopositiivisuuden kritiikkiin – Analyysi diskursiivisista strategioista [How do Finnish body positivity activists reply to their critics? A discursive strategy analysis]. *Sukupuolentutkimus–Genusforskning*, 32(4), 21–36.

II

Puhakka, A. (2019b). Rodullistettujen naisten lihavuusaktivismi internetissä – Hypernäkyvyys ja hypernäkyttömyys kehopositiivisuuskeskusteluissa [Hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility in Finnish intersectional online activism]. *Kulttuurintutkimus*, 36(3–4), 3–15.

III

Puhakka, A. (2019c). Can ambivalence hold potential for fat activism? An analysis of conflicting discourses on fatness in the Finnish column series *Jenny's Life Change*. *Fat Studies – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society*, 8(1), 60–74.

IV

Puhakka, A. (2021). Sofie's World: Resistance toward the thin ideal in Sofie Hagen's fat activist online content. In O. Sarpila, I. Kukkonen, T. Pajunen, & E. Åberg (eds.), *Appearance as Capital. The Normative Regulation of Aesthetic Capital Accumulation and Conversion* (pp. 135–148). Emerald Publishing Limited.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLES

LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION: ACTIVIST RESISTANCE(S)?.....	13
	1.1 Research questions	17
	1.2 Research aim.....	20
	1.3 Rationale for the study	21
	1.4 Thesis structure	22
2	RESEARCH CONTEXT	23
	2.1 Body positivity activism and fat activism.....	23
	2.2 Fat is a linguistic-discursive issue	24
	2.3 So <i>why</i> “body positivity activism” and not “fat activism”?	26
	2.4 Fat resistance in Finland before 2016	27
	2.5 Fat studies scholarship in Finland.....	29
3	ONLINE ACTIVISM, DATA, AND METHODS.....	31
	3.1 Activism online	31
	3.1.1 Background: Social media platforms and online activism.....	31
	3.1.2 The Internet, online platforms, and activism: Opportunities.....	32
	3.1.3 The Internet, online platforms, and activism: Limitations.....	34
	3.2 Study data	35
	3.2.1 Description of the data	35
	3.2.2 Ethics of online data gathering.....	38
	3.3 Methods.....	41
	3.3.1 Research paradigm	41
	3.3.2 Methodology and sampling	42
	3.3.3 Data analysis methods.....	42
	3.3.3.1 Qualitative content analysis.....	43
	3.3.3.2 Discourse analysis and discursive strategies	44
	3.3.3.3 Reparative reading	45
	3.3.3.4 Dialogic thematic analysis.....	46
	3.4 Researcher positionality.....	47
4	ARTICLE SUMMARIES.....	49
	4.1 Article I: Body positivity activists’ replies to criticism.....	49
	4.2 Article II: Hyper(in)visibility in online body positivity activism.....	50

4.3	Article III: The potential of ambivalence in body positivity activism?.....	52
4.4	Article IV: Resisting the thinness norm.....	53
5	RESULTS: MULTIPLE TYPES OF RESISTANCE.....	56
5.1	Extra-movement resistance	56
5.1.1	Activist counterspeech as a “second shift”	56
5.1.2	Humor in activism as resistance	59
5.2	Intra-movement resistance	61
5.2.1	Preface: The Scale Rebellion’s role in the movement.....	61
5.2.2	Insider counterspeech.....	62
5.3	Intrapersonal resistance	66
5.3.1	Ambivalence as activists’ “early career phase”?	66
5.3.2	Potential of ambivalence	67
5.4	Convergences in resistance? A cross-cultural comparison.....	68
5.5	Reverse appearance capital online	70
6	CONCLUSION: ACTIVIST RESISTANCES.....	73
	SUMMARY IN FINNISH	79
	REFERENCES.....	83
	ORIGINAL PAPERS	

1 INTRODUCTION: ACTIVIST RESISTANCE(S)?

The topic of this dissertation is resistances in online body positivity activism¹ in Finland in the latter half of the 2010s. It was precisely during this time that body positivity activism was beginning to turn “mainstream” in the country. I define activism as concrete actions with an established end goal. The final goal of body positivity activism, as it is understood in this thesis, is to end the systemic discrimination against fat people.² Finally, to add cyberspace to these definitions, I take online body positivity activism to mean intentional activity aiming to inform and influence others in matters related to fatness, carried out via digital content on the Internet, and comprising different combinations of text, images, and sound.³ The reader will have noticed that I did not define “resistances” at this juncture: it is precisely their multifaceted nature that will be under scrutiny in the pages to come.

The dissertation is based on online activist content created in 2015–2020. The content was mostly produced by Finnish speakers, but one part of the data is from an English-speaking activist. During this period, and perhaps with particular intensity in 2017–2018, body positivity activists’ online content came to form a counterdiscourse⁴ to the dominant medical discourse, which made it an intriguing topic for research. Before the emergence of body positivity activism, the medical discourse, which frames fatness as a problem that needs solving, had prevailed whenever fatness was the subject of discussion (and it also continues to yield power; Harjunen, 2009; 2017). As I write this introduction in 2023, it now seems that the vocality of those early activists has had tangible consequences in

¹ For an explanation why I use the term “body positivity activism” instead of “fat activism,” please see subsection 2.3.

² Throughout, I use the word “fat” instead of “obese” or “overweight.” When using the two latter terms, I employ quotation marks around them to indicate their non-neutral nature. My term choices are further described in subsection 2.2.

³ The definitions have been adapted from Article IV.

⁴ On occasion, to avoid repetition, I refer to activist resistance as “counterdiscourse” and “counterspeech.”

terms of how fatness is viewed in Finnish society⁵, and as such their work can be considered a success.

At the same time, neither Finland nor the world at large is yet free from fat discrimination. Cultural stereotypes regarding fatness are strongly negative and quite pronounced (Harjunen, 2020a). This stereotyping leads to stigmatization and marginalization in many central areas of life (e.g., Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Koivumäki et al., 2023; Meadows et al., 2021) such as education (Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009), the labor market (Härkönen & Räsänen, 2008; Kauppinen & Anttila, 2005), and healthcare (Puhl & Heuer, 2011; Sabin et al., 2012). Research has linked discrimination based on body size to “potentially harmful physiological consequences of exposure to weight stigma” (Schvey et al., 2014, p. 156; see also Tomiyama, 2014) as well as negative health outcomes and even a shorter life expectancy (Sutin et al., 2015). In sum, marginalization on the basis of fat embodiment may have severely negative consequences for a person’s opportunities in life. These contexts of discrimination were reflected in the activist content, in which some of the key themes addressed were diet culture and anti-fatness; the representations of fat people in the media; the healthcare system; physical movement and exercise; so-called body peace (*kehorauha*), which includes the right to eat, drink, and simply exist in public spaces without harassment; clothing choices; and matters related to physical accessibility.

What is more, body size seldom is the only basis upon which an individual is discriminated against. Today, this phenomenon of compound oppression is commonly called intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). As regards the primary interest of this dissertation, researchers have found that when coupled with fatness, gender (e.g., Gailey, 2014) and non-whiteness (e.g., Kwan, 2010), among others⁶, are linked to the risk of multiple marginalization and discrimination. In other words, anti-fat bias is a gendered phenomenon in that its consequences are more grave for women than men (Gailey, 2014; Harjunen, 2004). It is also a racialized phenomenon: “[i]n addition to size differences that can contribute to social stigma or otherness, women of color are doubly ‘othered’” (Williams, 2017, p. 6; see also Kasongo, 2021). Therefore, even if not expressly mentioned on all occasions, intersectionality cuts across this work (see, e.g., Rossi, 2021).

This research is situated within the academic disciplines of gender studies and fat studies.⁷ At the University of Jyväskylä (2017), the intersectional nature of gender studies is underlined: “Gender studies is a multidisciplinary field, which focuses on the concept of gender and its history, on gender relations and

⁵ For example, it has contributed to the amendment of the national Current Care Guidelines, which now urge all healthcare practitioners in Finland to take a more “body positive,” i.e., holistic and less shame-inducing, approach with their “obese” patients (Haimi & Mattila, 2021).

⁶ Other intersections are also relevant, such as social class (e.g., Harjunen, 2017; Herndon, 2005), poverty (e.g., Rinaldi et al., 2020), sexuality (e.g., Hill, 2009), and disability (e.g., Herndon, 2021; Hill, 2022; Meleo-Erwin, 2014). Nonetheless, this dissertation’s foci are fatness, gender, and “race.” These are the intersections that were the most pertinent in the activists’ content.

⁷ For the sake of consistency, I write the initial letters of the names of academic disciplines in lower case.

on the power structures that affect all figurations of gender.” Fat studies, in turn, has been described in *The Fat Studies Reader*, a volume fundamental to the discipline, as follows: “fat studies is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma placed on fat and the fat body” (Solovay & Rothblum, 2009, p. 2).

The combination of the two fields, both emphasizing the importance of the intersectional approach (see also Pausé, 2014) and examining power structures in society, lays the foundation for the dissertation. An important convergence between fat studies and gender studies is the conclusion, reached in several studies, that women’s and men’s fatnesses are not “created equal.” The thinness norm applies to all genders (e.g., Brewis, 2017; Puhl & Brownell, 2001), but as noted above, the expectations of non-fat embodiment are more heightened for women, and the social sanctions for breaking this norm are more severe for them (e.g., Bordo, 1993; Rice, 2007; Sobal & Maurer, 1999). As a concrete example from the labor market context, a Finnish study showed that fat women were both paid less and advanced slower in their careers than non-fat women. What is more, fat embodiment did not play a similar role in the case of men (Kauppinen & Anttila, 2005; see also Sarlio-Lähteenkorva et al., 2004).

The ways in which fatness and gender are intertwined, and in which people are read in terms of their gender, are also related to the amount and distribution of fat. One question is how fat people’s gender is read within the binary system – or which traits are considered “feminine” or “masculine”; another question is how fatness is read on the trans spectrum for those who present as transwomen or transmen; and yet another question concerns how fatness is read along the nonbinary spectrum.

Francis Ray White (2020, p. 110) has pointed out that mostly, “the binary categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are taken for granted” in fat studies. This has translated into work which aims to analyze what fatness “does” to gender (ibid., p. 119) primarily from the (implicit) point of view of cis women and cis men.⁸ For instance, Jeannine A. Gailey (2014, p. 112) has asserted that fat (cis) women’s bodies can be seen to indicate both femininity and masculinity: they are feminine because of the softness and curviness they display as well as masculine because of the physical space they take up. Addressing the contemporary cultural landscape of the United States in a fashion quite applicable to other Western, or global North, contexts as well, Cecilia Hartley (2001) contends that (cis) female fatness, in particular, is marked as a non-normative corporeality in a society which favors thinness and women taking up as little space as possible (see also Taylor, 2021, p. 77). Conversely, cis male fatness may more easily be interpreted as “bulk” or an indication of physical strength and masculinity (e.g., Monaghan & Malson, 2013).

Less research has been done on the intersection of gender and embodiment when it comes to fat trans people presenting as female or male, or those

⁸ “If someone’s gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth, then they are cisgender, or ‘cis’ for short” (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2023).

presenting as nonbinary. The dearth of research on the fat/trans intersection in both fat studies and trans studies was remarked upon by White (2014) nearly a decade ago, however the situation has changed somewhat since then (White, 2020; but see Orr, 2023). Moreover, those at the intersection of fat and trans also experience invisibility “in community and activist spaces and in online/social media forums” (White, 2020, p. 114). Therefore – and especially since the dissertation data includes content from several activists who do not identify as women – it is important to discuss fat embodiment as it relates to other genders than cis women (and cis men).

According to White (2020), for many of their research participants who identified as trans, fat was closely tied to successful “passing,” that is, “the ability to be consistently read by others as the gender with which they identify” (ibid., p. 117). This finding is all the more important given that existing literature oftentimes discusses transgender embodiment in terms of so-called genital morphology (see, e.g., Luna, 2018), addressing all other physical changes based on the assumption that the body is thin (White, 2020, p. 119). However, fat was significant for several of White’s (2020) research participants in how they experienced their embodiments as being read by others.

Interestingly, for many, the primary concern was not the amount of adipose tissue per se or being squarely “fat” or “thin”; rather, the fat distribution on the body was more relevant (ibid., p. 118). As White (ibid., p. 122) puts it: “Where fat in the ‘wrong places’ did indeed come with the expectation of removability, there was an equally prominent desire for fat in the ‘right places.’” In other words, as discussed earlier, fatness can act as a feminizing or masculinizing trait. Therefore, adipose tissue often accentuates breasts and hips, which are frequently interpreted as indices of female embodiment and may thus be welcomed by those who identify as women. Those identifying as men, on the other hand, might experience this type of “feminizing” fatness more as an obstacle (ibid., p. 119). At the same time, a fat trans man – in line with the above-cited research on cis men – may be read as “a big dude, but not outside the norm for such things” (Bergman, 2009, p. 141).

What, then, about the relationship between fatness and the embodiment of nonbinary identifying people? In White’s (2020) research, it surfaced that “some significant differences arose around the participants’ experiences of the difficulty, or indeed impossibility, of ‘passing’ as non-binary given that bodies are almost always ascribed binary characteristics” (p. 123). Many of White’s interviewees recognized that the most likely way to be read as nonbinary was through the “androgyny” model; however, this look was seen to be very closely tied to non-fat embodiment (not to mention White and able-bodied embodiment; ibid., pp. 123–124).⁹ This meant that fatness was often experienced as an obstacle for one to be read as nonbinary (ibid., pp. 124–125). Yet not all of those involved in the

⁹ Annamari Vänskä (2002) has analyzed male and female androgyny by close reading the Calvin Klein perfume advertisement *One* from 1998. Interestingly, according to her research, “androgynous male bodies allow the extension of the categorical boundaries of masculinity, whereas representations of androgynous women merely feed into the prevailing stereotypes of femininity, namely the fear of fat and fatness” (Vänskä, 2006, p. 158).

research concurred: one participant actually suggested that, on the contrary, fatness might be utilized as a resource in achieving an ungendered body, namely “not by removing gendered features (breasts, hips) but by *embracing* ‘maximal gender signifiers’” (my emphasis; *ibid.*, p. 126), and further stated that “I’m not able to take all gender signifiers off my body but I want to put them all on” (*ibid.*).

In sum, fatness and gender are intertwined in manifold ways. Indeed, White (2020, p. 127) has described fat as an “active producer, enabler, or even destroyer of gender.” Going even beyond that, they have noted that “[i]n some cases it seems as though fat *is* gender, in that its removal can signify androgynous or ungendered body. Existing analyses certainly highlight the many powers of fat to masculinize and feminize bodies, sometimes at the same time” (emphasis in original; *ibid.*). Black trans theorist Da’Shaun L. Harrison has stated, too, that since many people are not able to separate gender and size from one another, “fatness oftentimes does exist as its own gender” (Mercedes et al., 2022, 23:50; see also Harrison, 2021).

Critical antinormative thinking and “reading against the grain” theoretizations developed within the ambit of queer studies (e.g., Rossi, 2017; Sedgwick, 2003) have also been a significant background influence on this study, visible especially in Article I. Indeed, fat studies and queer studies share a fundamental questioning of norms and normativities. Therefore, what Jackie Wykes (2014, p. 4) has written about “queer” applies well to both fields of inquiry: they involve “a mode of political and critical inquiry which seeks to expose taken-for-granted assumptions, trouble neat categories, and unfix the supposedly fixed alignment of bodies, gender, desire and identities.”

1.1 Research questions

This dissertation consists of four original articles (Puhakka 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2021) and this summary chapter. Also called an integrative chapter (Nikander & Piattoeva, 2017), the summary chapter has its own research questions, which are simultaneously independent from those of the articles yet greatly influenced by them. In formulating the present research questions, I draw from the work of United States-based body positivity activist Virgie Tovar (2017), who discusses fatphobia¹⁰ occurring at three distinct levels: institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.¹¹

¹⁰ Fatphobia means fear and hatred of fat bodies. Following Aubrey Gordon (2021), I will mostly use the terms “anti-fatness” and “anti-fat bias” to refer to this phenomenon.

¹¹ Similar typologies have been put forward by social movement scholars as well. For instance, Özden Melis Uluğ and Yasemin Gülsüm Acar (2018) present a tripartite classification of the levels at which social movements can bring about change: the individual level, the group level, and the systemic level. In a more recent study, Acar and Uluğ (2022) apply these levels specifically to fat activism and fat justice. However, given the nature of this study, I am happy about and appreciative of the opportunity to apply explicitly activist knowledge in academic work in the present dissertation.

During the course of the dissertation work, I looked at resistance in activism and noticed that it, too, takes place on several different planes – thereby translating to resistances. After the articles were published and I examined them together, it became clear that the levels which Tovar links to fatphobia are also applicable to the *resistance* of fatphobia. However, given that Tovar’s and my foci are different, I made some modifications to her framework (see Table 1). In this way, I hope to ask questions which elucidate the topic of resistance(s) as much as possible.

According to Tovar (2017), the institutional level of fatphobia is linked to “meaningful participation in society.” This includes aspects such as access to healthcare and representation “in the culture at large.” In sum, the institutional level is about the “general sense that the culture is invested in your participation and existence” (ibid). In this dissertation, Tovar’s institutional level is reshaped into **extra-movement resistance**. In other words, I direct my gaze toward how activists resist the anti-fat bias occurring at the societal level, which encompasses the “outsiders” of the movement in general and its public critics in particular.

In Tovar’s typology, the next level she has named interpersonal is about “how other individuals treat and see you. This is where experiences can begin to diverge between fat people and thin people” (ibid.). Here Tovar is making the point that many people, also those who are not fat, may feel badly about their bodies yet are spared of the negative ramifications of societal anti-fat bias. My remodeling of the interpersonal level is called **intra-movement resistance**, and it is inspired by Tovar’s work in that it concerns the diverging experiences *within* body positivity activism in Finland. All activists do agree that the systemic marginalization of fat people needs to stop, but because of different intersectionalities, not everyone’s voice gets heard equally. This creates friction – which I interpret as resistances – within the movement.

The third level, per Tovar, is the intrapersonal level, which refers to “how fatphobia affects how someone sees themselves. ... The pain of intrapersonal fatphobia is very real” (ibid.). In the framework of this dissertation, the coupling of intrapersonal anti-fatness with the activist commitment to societal change and the cessation of anti-fat bias leads to conflicting internal feelings – **ambivalence** – regarding fatness. Looking at ambivalence from the viewpoint of resistance(s), I argue that this conflict between (a) “what I know is right and what I should be thinking” (= anti-fat bias is wrong and has to come to an end) and (b) “what I still sometimes think but shouldn’t be thinking” (= I don’t want to be fat) can be conceptualized as **internal resistance** although it may be intermittent and does not necessarily diminish the influence of activism.

There are three levels in Tovar’s taxonomy, yet this dissertation includes a fourth question (see below), which combines all of Tovar’s strata. The focus here is on the potential **convergences between** the resistance(s) in the Finnish and non-Finnish **movements**. They may take place outside the movement, inside the movement, and/or intrapersonally, as we have just seen.

In light of all of the above, this study seeks to answer the following research questions (also summarized in Table 1 below) in the context of online body positivity activism in Finland in the latter half of the 2010s:¹²

- (1) How is anti-fat bias resisted in relation to those “outside” the movement?
- (2) What meaning negotiations take place regarding the movement’s fundamentals within it?
- (3) How can the presence of activists’ own anti-fat bias, or ambivalence, be conceptualized?
- (4) What convergences are there between the Finnish¹³ and non-Finnish resistances, if any?

TABLE 1 Tovar’s (2017) levels of fatphobia, my modification of these levels into types of resistance, their adaptation into research questions, and their connection to the original articles

Level of fatphobia (Tovar 2017)	My modification of Tovar’s level into a type of resistance	Main research question	Primary connection to Article #
institutional	extra-movement resistance	(1) How is anti-fat bias resisted in relation to those “outside” the movement?	I (Puhakka, 2019a)
interpersonal	intra-movement resistance	(2) What meaning negotiations take place regarding the movement’s fundamentals within it?	II (Puhakka, 2019b)
intrapersonal	ambivalence or internal resistance	(3) How can the presence of activists’ own anti-fat bias, or ambivalence, be conceptualized?	III (Puhakka, 2019c)
all of the above	all of the above	(4) What convergences are there between the Finnish and non-Finnish resistances, if any?	IV (Puhakka, 2021)

¹² The research questions and their numbering (1–4) loosely correspond to the main themes and numbers of the original articles (I–IV). However, as many of the articles discuss more than one type of resistance, I have arranged the results section accordingly.

¹³ Not every activist in the movement identifies as Finnish. Therefore, whenever I use the adjective form, it is synonymous with body positivity activism carried out in Finland.

1.2 Research aim

If we take the earlier statement that the final goal of body positivity activism is to end the systemic discrimination against fat people as a starting point, then the first research question asks the obvious: *how* do activists in Finland resist the anti-fat bias that permeates the society? The answers I give to this inquiry in Article I are, of course, based on the data (activist online content) and therefore context-specific. Nonetheless, the findings do also have broader relevance since fat activist counterspeech has evoked extensive research interest (for some recent examples, see Casadó-Marín & Gracia-Arnaiz, 2020; Doherty et al., 2021; Garcia Hernandez, 2021; Haney et al., 2021; Senyonga & Luna, 2021; Taylor & Mitchell, 2022).

The second research question is interesting because intra-movement contestations – or even conflicts – are far from a rare occurrence (e.g., Cloke, 2013). In addition, they carry potential to spur activism onward since “[c]ontestation within activism will always serve the vitality of the greater movement” (LGBTI Swaziland, 2019). Hence, probing into “resistances from within” is important for the study at hand. The matter has been discussed in the Finnish body positivity activism context by Kaisu Hynnä-Granberg (2021a; 2022a). Outside the country, intra-movement contestations in body positivity/fat activism have been looked into extensively (e.g., Darwin & Miller, 2021), particularly regarding the movement’s exclusions of Black (e.g., Johansson, 2020; Shackelford, 2021; Williams, 2021), Indigenous (e.g., Gillon, 2020; Gillon & Pausé, 2022), and other people of color (e.g., Azeez, 2021). These discussions, in turn, are intimately intertwined with those on racism, white privilege, and colonialism/coloniality (Choudhury, 2021; Harrison, 2021; Miller & Platenburg, 2021; Mxhalisa, 2021; Rashatwar, 2021; Taylor, 2018; Stewart & Breeden, 2021; Strings, 2019). Internal debates have also arisen about body size, that is, when the movement has been seen to cater to and/or be co-opted by so-called “small fats” or even normative-sized people (e.g., Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Dionne, 2017a; Harjunen, 2023; Johnston & Taylor, 2008; Ospina, 2019; Sastre, 2014).

The third theme I explore in this dissertation concerns the instances of ambivalence which dismantle the common assumption that activism is always about unyielding resistance. Based on the data analyzed in this work, quite the contrary is true: not all the body positivity activists in Finland are uniform or coherent in their resistance vis-à-vis societal anti-fat bias. As a matter of fact, some parts of their online content can be read as nods to dieting culture and the anti-fatness rampant in Finnish society. The phenomenon of body positivity and/or fat activist ambivalence has been documented in Finland (Hynnä-Granberg, 2021b; 2022a) and widely internationally (e.g., Cooper, 1998; Donaghue & Clemitshaw, 2012; Fox, 2018; LeBesco, 2004; Meleo-Erwin, 2011; Murray, 2008).

Lastly, the fourth research question brings a cross-cultural aspect to resistances in activism. More specifically, my interest lies in comparing the ways

of resisting of a non-Finnish fat activist, well-known stand-up comedian Sofie Hagen, with those of the body positivity activists working in Finland. Particularly in recent years, more and more academic work on fat activism has been published outside the anglophone context (Cooper, 2009, and Maor, 2013a, among others, have underlined its importance; see also next subsection), and cross-cultural comparisons have been carried out regarding North American and Finnish fat women's experiences (Gailey & Harjunen, 2019) as well as weight-loss makeover TV (Ritter, 2022). Kaisu Hynnä and Kata Kyrölä (2019) have compared Finnish and North American body positive and fat activist blogs using the framework of affect. In addition, Charlotte Cooper's (2021, p. 32) work on fat activism draws from participants from the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Finland. Nevertheless, I am not aware of previous research that has specifically compared and contrasted different forms of resistance in body positivity or fat activism by using an international data set.

In deliberating the answers to the research questions, my overall research aim is to contribute to the **diversification of our understanding of the many faces of resistance** in activism in general, and body positivity and fat activism in particular. Ever since I read James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), I have been intrigued by the concepts of micro/grassroots/subtle/everyday forms of resistance (for "micro fat activism" specifically, see Cooper, 2021, pp. 52–55). While many of the resistances encountered within the sphere of Finnish online body positivity activism in the last decade can hardly be called subtle, I believe that analyzing the many facets resistance can take within a social movement is an important contribution to both activist practice and academic work.

1.3 Rationale for the study

Why did I choose to study the Finnish body positivity movement and body positivity activists' online content? First, I would argue that it is important to both *do* body positivity activism and *study* it. Put differently, the lookist and fattist societal ideals need to be critically examined within both frameworks, the activist and the academic. To thoroughly peruse activists' online content is not only helpful in pointing out the ways in which marginalization currently takes place but may also contribute to finding pathways to a more just society for all.

A second reason to study the body positivity movement in Finland is that this research, and others like it, can play a significant role in documenting the recent history of this type of activism in the country. As Charlotte Cooper and Samantha Murray (2012, p. 134) have exhorted, fat activism needs to be documented and analyzed lest its history be lost – which would compromise the movement's vitality in the future. In fact, this fear is not unfounded: of the data sets I analyzed in the original articles, a significant number have since undergone digital ephemeralization (e.g., Joutseno, 2021) partly, majoritarily, or even entirely. According to my understanding, in all of the cases, it was the activists who chose to discontinue the digital permanence of their content, so this course

of action can also be interpreted as an exercise in agency. Still, the disquieting possibility remains that this activism's history could disappear entirely, which Cooper and Murray brought up more than a decade ago.

Thirdly, this dissertation plays a part in the geographical and cultural diversification of fat studies, a development Cooper (2009) called for at a time when the discipline was still mostly dominated by studies carried out in the United States context. Research in the field has expanded markedly since then, and the current geographical range of fat studies scholarship is, in fact, too broad for one researcher to keep track of. Having said that, there are still considerable knowledge gaps regarding body positivity activism in Finland, and this study, together with others, attempts to fill those gaps step by step.

Lastly, the creation of this work is a statement in support of academic disciplines – such as fat studies, gender studies, and queer studies – that currently face a backlash internationally from those claiming these courses of study are not about scientific work but peddling ideology. I will not give specific examples so as not to give those parties more visibility than they already have; suffice it to say that in the majority of cases, the critics have not looked properly (or at all) at the central tenets of fat studies. Instead, they not only fail to differentiate between fat activism and fat studies (which, despite sharing a common history, do diverge in several instances) but also appear to cloak their dislike of fatness and fat people in criticism seemingly directed at the academic field.

1.4 Thesis structure

This dissertation consists of four original articles and a summary chapter. The publications are listed above and appended to this document. To avoid future confusion, I have divided the summary chapter into sections instead of (sub)chapters.

This introductory section comprised the research questions, the aim of the study, and its rationale. Section 2 turns to some central considerations meant to facilitate understanding of the research context at large. After that, Section 3 discusses doing activism online, presents the study data, addresses the methodological choices made in this dissertation, and finishes with researcher positionality.

The rest of the summary chapter consists of the presentation and further analyses of the articles, published as an important part of the PhD work. The summaries of the articles are set forth in Section 4, and research results then ensue in Section 5. The dissertation rounds off with concluding remarks in Section 6.

2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

2.1 Body positivity activism and fat activism

Body positivity activism and fat activism are closely linked and, in essence, synonymous in the Finnish context (see subsection 2.3 “So *why* ‘body positivity activism’ and not ‘fat activism’?”). The use of a contextual framework which focuses on fat activism is therefore warranted. Fat activism, “a radical social movement” (Cooper, 2021), has its roots in the social justice movements of the 1960s. Spurred on by these societal calls for gender and racial justice, among others, fat activism, too, started gaining ground with its demands that the systematic discrimination against fat people be eradicated once and for all.¹⁴ The movement has since expanded and become more institutionalized (one example being the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, a United States based “fat rights organization dedicated to protecting the rights and improving the quality of life for fat people”; NAAFA, n.d.) while also taking on various forms and traveling to other countries and continents.¹⁵

Cooper’s (2021) book *Fat Activism* has significantly influenced this dissertation’s focus on resistance(s) in activism.¹⁶ One of its central findings is that fat activism (and therefore resistance) is not uniform, rigid, let alone monolithic. It is highly diverse in nature, and to attempt to package it into one

¹⁴ In addition to being called body positivity instead of fat activism, in the Finnish context, “body positivity” can also denote a movement which aims to give center stage to all marginalized bodies, including disabled bodies and trans bodies. Body Posi -messut, a Finnish body positivity live event in early 2019, which attracted more than 200 visitors (Body Posi Suomi ry, 2019), adopted this approach to body positivity. In this dissertation, my focus is on those activists who place fatness at the center of their activism. At the same time, many of them do recognize how fatness interacts with other social classifications such as gender and “race.”

¹⁵ Here space does not allow for an exhaustive journey through the fat activist movement’s history or its host of forms. For those interested in learning more, Cooper (2012; 2021, among many others) has written extensively on the topic.

¹⁶ The book was originally published in 2016. The second edition (Cooper, 2021) includes a preface which addresses some of the post-2016 societal changes related to fat activism, including Black Lives Matter as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

neat box does not do it justice (Heiselberg, 2021). Other key concepts that prompted me to look at the many faces of resistance, including activists yielding to the negative discourses regarding fatness, were those of ambiguous fat activism (Cooper, 2021, pp. 55–59; see also Murray, 2005; 2008; 2010) as well as failed fat activism (Cooper, 2021, pp. 150–151). In fact, a quarter of a century ago already, Cooper (1998) showed that fat people in general, and fat activists in particular, had conflicting feelings about fatness, an ambivalent position that in turn engendered feelings of shame and could even make activists question their right to be involved in the movement.

At this juncture, it is important to note that there also exist strands of body positivity that have strayed far enough from fat activism, the “ancestor” movement, to no longer be recognizable as its heirs. The aims of these variations often have to do with either marketing products and services related to weight loss and/or “well-being,” or a focus on individuals’ satisfaction with their body and outward appearance (e.g., Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2022; Dionne, 2017b; Farrell, 2021, pp. 55–56; Harjunen, 2023; Kyrölä, 2021, p. 113). I am cognizant that these strands of body positivity, often characterized as postfeminist¹⁷ (e.g., Darwin & Miller, 2021; Gill & Elias, 2014), exist both in Finland and abroad, and many a time their reach is broader than the “fat activist version” of body positivity activism. Despite the extent of the former, the focus of this work is on the latter.

2.2 Fat is a linguistic-discursive issue¹⁸

Language matters. In acknowledging that, I want to consider in some detail why fat activism became body positivity in Finland, while it is called fat activism in several other countries. Although some variations do co-exist, such as “body activist” and “fat activist,” Finnish body positivity activists have chosen to call themselves precisely that.

In an attempt to trace back this choice of vocabulary, let us first observe that, in practice, no neutral word seems to exist to denote fat corporeality or fatness, neither in English nor in Finnish. I believe that the explanation resides in the stigmatized nature of fatness and fat embodiment. Put differently, even if the word “fat” were in theory a neutral descriptor of a particular type of physique or way of existing in a body, the negative cultural connotations linked to that phenomenon have seeped into language use as well.

¹⁷ According to Rosalind Gill (2007, p. 147), postfeminism is “best understood as a distinctive sensibility, made up of a number of interrelated themes. These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference.”

¹⁸ I use the term “linguistic-discursive” to indicate my background in both humanities and social sciences (see also, e.g., Prearo-Lima, 2020).

While my background is in linguistics and philology (Puhakka 2011a), it is queer studies that has most helped me to critically approach the normativities present in language use. Precisely because no neutral term for fat embodiment appears to exist, queer studies is useful in teasing out the possible reasons for why this might be so, and how we might proceed. Why is fatness – as a phenomenon and as a word – something we cannot (seem to) bear to know (Britzman, 1995)?

With certain words that are used to denote fat corporeality, it is relatively easy to trace their provenance, and how they are linked to fatness as a stigmatized trait. Several researchers (e.g., Harjunen, 2009; Lupton, 2018) have pointed out that the medical field uses such terms as “obese” and “overweight” to emphasize normative (e.g., Rossi, 2006), non-fat embodiment. Indeed, the medical establishment sees fatness, or “obesity” in its parlance, as “a disease or a precursor to disease” (Lupton, 2018, p. 26). “Overweight,” in turn, echoes Western medicine with its firm emphasis on quantification, measuring, BMI charts, and overall normativization (Lupton, 2018). After all, the very word contains the presupposition that there is a normative weight (range), and those over it no longer fit in that category.

A question related to language use worth addressing is that there are at least two ways to translate the word “fat” in Finnish: *lihava* and *läski*. It is not altogether simple to analyze the intricacies of the Finnish language in a text written in English. But again, since words do carry enormous significance, I will attempt to do that regardless.

As said, the word *lihava* is (in theory) a neutral adjective with which to describe a human being (or an animal) who has “plenty of fat on their body” (Dictionary of Contemporary Finnish, n.d.a; translation AP). Not everyone is comfortable with this word, and even some body positivity activists denounce it. At the same time, there are those who do not have a problem with calling themselves *lihava*.

I trace this development partly to the “mainstreaming work” done by body positivity activists, but actually, this has been the case already before the movement emerged in Finland. In her doctoral dissertation, Hannele Harjunen (2009, p. 22) found that all the women she interviewed for her research preferred to call themselves *lihava* over the Finnish equivalents of “obese” or “overweight.”¹⁹ In more recent times and with the advent of body positivity, there has been more open talk about taking back and owning the word *lihava*, as

¹⁹ Harjunen (2009, p. 22) further reflects on this choice in a footnote: “it seemed that the interviewees considered that the word ‘overweight’ as referring to the body as a ‘measurable’ entity, a somewhat separate characteristic, whereas ‘fat’ was considered as a more descriptive term that could also include the person who is fat.” This is intriguing, because as has been discussed above, fatness is a strongly stigmatizing trait especially for women. Thus, I would have expected the female interviewees to favor “overweight” instead of “fat” precisely because the former might imply body weight as a “purely” physiological feature, thereby potentially averting stigma. However, since this was not the case with Harjunen’s interviewees, and my preliminary hypothesis did not hold, this matter certainly deserves further investigation.

well as restoring it to its “original,” neutral state so that it would be used to describe a physical body only – not the attached, imagined negative stereotypes.

Another possible Finnish translation for the word “fat” is *läski*. The original meaning of *läski* is in fact “pork fat” (Dictionary of Contemporary Finnish, n.d.b), and the word continues to be used in that sense as well. More often than not, however, it is used pejoratively (ibid.) to denote a fat person. Since *läski* is considered to be even more derogatory than *lihava*, some body positivity activists have taken deliberate measures to take back the word and normalize it to the extent possible (e.g., Shemeikka, 2018).²⁰

Here it is important to note how the Finnish choice of vocabulary gives away the actual intertwining of body positivity activism and fat activism. In addition to talking about body positivity activism, several activists do also talk about *läskiaktivismi* (fat activism), thus (a) attempting to dismantle the negative connotations of the word *läski* by making it less of a taboo and reclaiming it, and (b) demonstrating that fat activism is part and parcel of their way of engaging with the body positivity movement – which in many instances renders the two concepts practically synonymous.

Some activists do use body positivity and fat activism interchangeably. In fact, to even call fat activism by that name (*läskiaktivismi*) can be interpreted as an act of resistance because of the negative connotations *läski* holds. As noted, this resistant potential stems from the fact that *läski* is an insult, a colloquial expression carrying negative connotations that aim to shame and degrade the addressee – which therefore qualitatively differentiates it from *lihava*.²¹

2.3 So *why* “body positivity activism” and not “fat activism”?

Let us now come back to the question posed in the previous subsection. For the most part, when activists outside Finland want to address fatness expressly as a human rights question, they talk about fat activism, not body positivity activism.

²⁰ I am unable to resist the temptation to share two additional expressions found under the “*läski*” entry (Dictionary of Contemporary Finnish, n.d.b) because they further illustrate the negative connotations “fat” holds in language, and thus in culture. The first expression is *mennä läskiksi*, which literally translates as “to go all fat” or “to turn into fat” and is used to convey that something failed. The second expression is *lyödä läskiksi*, which means “to quit trying” (the literal translation is approximately “to pound something into fat”).

²¹ So far, I have discussed the meanings of and differences between *lihava* and *läski*. However, an additional linguistic-discursive consideration is the Finnish translation for body positivity, namely, *kehopositiivisuus*. Here “body” translates as *keho*, which has been used especially in the field of medicine (Kolehmainen, 2001) and, perhaps for this reason, is thought of as a relatively neutral term. The other common word for body, *ruumis*, which denotes both a living and a dead body, has not been used when talking about body positivity in Finnish – except for mocking purposes: the term *ruumispositiivisuus* has been used in a derisive sense by an anonymous commentator on an online discussion forum (Vierailija, 2016), for instance. The question then arises: might the use of the “neutral” *keho* in the Finnish translation for body positivity be related to a wish to avoid the word *lihava*, let alone *läski*, because of its derogatory connotations? This topic certainly merits further looking into, and I thank Leena-Maija Rossi for pointing it out.

So how come something that is so commonly referred to as fat activism elsewhere has come to be called body positivity activism in Finland?

First, I am of the opinion that this choice was precipitated by the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle's 2017 campaign the Scale Rebellion (*Vaakakapina*), which brought body positivity as a movement to the attention of the larger audience. The Scale Rebellion was inspired by activists from abroad who used the specific term of body positivity (Lehtinen, 2020). Indeed, before it came to equal something useful when marketing one's products or services aimed at weight loss and/or other body modification practices (Harjunen, 2020b), body positivity was a radical concept outside the Finnish borders, too.

Second, it is noteworthy that there was no predecessor to body positivity activism in Finland – unlike in the United States, for instance. This may have raised the threshold to call the budding movement “fat activism” (*ibid.*). This would be especially probable since, as demonstrated, the word “fat” is considered to be very stigmatizing.

At the same time, to call fat activism body positivity creates confusion and potentially encumbers the activists' efforts to get their message across. Both supporters (Omaheimo & Särämä, 2017) and critics (Juti, 2017) of the movement have pointed out that the two should be clearly separated so that meaningful conversations are easier to carry out. When it is not clear what is meant by body positivity, discussions ensue in which the parties talk about different things to begin with.

What is more, the study data shows that even within the relatively small group of body positivity activists operating in Finland, there is little consensus as to what body positivity entails in the ultimate analysis, and what its non-negotiables are. Body positivity is a new term in the Finnish context, yet it turns out to be surprisingly slippery. Or perhaps the ameba-like nature of the concept is due precisely to its newness: the meaning negotiations regarding its most basic characteristics are still underway.

2.4 Fat resistance in Finland before 2016

All activism is resistance, but not all resistance is activism. (Stewart & Breeden, 2021, p. 224)

When I first started working on this dissertation, I held a paper entitled “The Subtle Forms of Resistance Utilized by Self-Identified Fat People as a Response to Lookism and Sizeism-Based Marginalization” at a conference in the United States in late 2010 (Puhakka, 2010). The presentation was based on a pilot study I had carried out earlier that year, but unfortunately I cannot share its results now since I did not ask for the participants' consent properly. As becomes clear from the title, however, I was interested in learning about fat people's subtle resistance(s); in other words, resistance which is very real even though it is not

labeled as activism (Stewart & Breeden, 2021). Indeed, resistance to societal anti-fat bias has occurred in many more ways than through explicit activism only.²²

I therefore want to use this opportunity to mention some examples of what fat resistance looked like in Finland before the arrival of the body positivity movement “proper.” I suggest that although 2016 has been dubbed “Year Zero” of the discourse on fat(ness) in Finland (S. Särämä, personal communication, February 1, 2018), and despite the supposed absence of (organized) activism before that, there *was* public counterspeech as regards re-signifying what fatness meant and could mean – to even interpret it as an “emergent discourse” might be justified since it came from several sources. To facilitate the discussion of these pre-body positivity avant-gardists, I will classify them into three groups: print media; the blogosphere; and the arts.

One landmark article in print media, “Läskisota²³,” was published in the *Apu* magazine on March 15, 2007 (Hiltunen, 2007). The journalist, Pekka Hiltunen, opens the text with a quote from Pia, a woman who has just started blogging and writes in her first post: “I am FAT. I can’t believe how long it’s taken me to say that” (translation AP). The name of Pia’s blog is *Life of a Fat Woman* (*Lihavan naisen elämää*²⁴), and she relates to Hiltunen that to go ahead with blogging translated into coming out as fat for her (cf. Murray, 2008; Pausé, 2012; Saguy & Ward, 2011; Salvatelli, 2019).

Interestingly, Hiltunen makes reference to a series of articles entitled *Läskikapina* (*Fat Rebellion*) published in early 2007 (see also Kyrölä & Harjunen, 2007) by *Helsingin Sanomat*, the biggest newspaper in the country, whose aim was not to empower fat people, but instead to educate citizens on the dangers of “obesity.” In February 2007, *Fat Rebellion* was counterbalanced by another article in *Helsingin Sanomat* entitled “Todelliset asiantuntijat” (“The Real Experts”). As the introductory paragraph of the article states, journalist Anna-Stina Nykänen “for once asks those who are urged to lose weight” (translation AP) about their fatness (see also Puhakka, 2011c).

As pointed out, the Finnish pre-body positive – or even fat activist – blogosphere²⁵ was launched with the blog *Life of a Fat Woman*. Probably the most visible blog before the year 2016 was *More to Love* (n.d.), active during 2009–2013

²² For instance, the following year, another conference presentation of mine was entitled “Challenging Sizeism-Based Marginalization: Reactive and Proactive Resistance Strategies and How to Build a Bridge between Them” (Puhakka, 2011b).

²³ The article’s name contains a double meaning. It can be translated as both “war on fat” and “war waged by fat people,” a pun no doubt intended by the journalist.

²⁴ As a matter of fact, some remnants of the blog remain although it is, of course, impossible to know for certain if it is the same blog based on the title only (*Lihavan naisen elämää*, 2008).

²⁵ The blogosphere means “all the blogs (= records of personal thoughts and opinions) on the Internet, and the people who write or read them” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In the context of fat activism or so-called fat acceptance (see, e.g., Harjunen, 2023, pp. 39–40), the blogging community is often referred to as the fatosphere (Harding & Kirby, 2009). The fatosphere is “an online space in which individuals (both fat and thin) can engage in and contribute to critical dialogue about obesity, and receive informal, peer-based support for a range of stigmatizing experiences” (Dickins et al., 2011, p. 1681).

(for more information on the blog, see Hynnä & Kyrölä, 2019, pp. 2–3).²⁶ Briefly put, the blog “encourage[d] its readers to accept their non-normative bodies and to enjoy their lives in the now” (ibid., p. 2). Another, perhaps a lesser-known blog was *Hefty Training*. The blog began in 2013, and the blogger Anna Rinta-Jyllilä continued to post until October 2021. However, in 2023, *Hefty Training* was made private and is currently unavailable. A common thread running through *Hefty Training*’s posts was the advocacy of a weight-neutral and Health At Every Size (HAES) approach (e.g., Robison, 2005) to physical exercise and well-being, as well as an explicit discussion of body positivity, too.

A third blog I want to bring forth is Javiera Marchant Aedo’s blog (Marchant Aedo, n.d.).²⁷ This blog began in 2014 and was last updated in 2019. The online journal’s initial purpose was to anonymously document the blogger’s bariatric operation process (see also Gay, 2018), but the tone of the posts, from the very first one, was distinctly condemning of and defiant vis-à-vis societal anti-fat bias; in other words, the blog can actually be considered body positive or fat activist.

Lastly, I want to mention the art scene, and more specifically, fiction writing. Writer Eila Jaatinen was truly in the vanguard of fat resistance already in the 1980s and 1990s, when she published two books on women and fatness. They include a collection of prose poems, *Lihavan matamin laulut* (Jaatinen, 1989), and a book containing short prose on the attitudes that fat women face daily, *Iloiset kilot: totta ja tarua tuhdeista tytöistä* (Jaatinen, 1998). Like the other groups of pre-body positivity activism, so is the oeuvre of Eila Jaatinen and its significance to the later developments of the Finnish body positivity movement severely underresearched and would thereby deserve much more academic attention.

2.5 Fat studies scholarship in Finland

The past 17 years have seen a considerable rise in fat studies scholarship produced in Finland. In addition to including gender in their analyses (e.g., Kyrölä & Harjunen, 2007; Harjunen, 2009), fat studies researchers have combined theorizing fatness and feminist theories of the body (Kyrölä & Harjunen, 2017) as well as looked at the role and consequences of neoliberalism (Harjunen, 2017; 2023), the media (Kyrölä, e.g., 2014; 2021; Ritter, 2021; 2022; Rossi, 2007), the arts (Hynnä-Granberg, 2021a; Juntunen, 2021; Pääkkölä, 2017), exclusion in physical exercise (e.g., Aho, 2020; Harjunen, 2016; 2019a), and blogging (Limatius, 2020). In addition to peer-reviewed work, several bachelor’s and master’s theses have

²⁶ *More to Love*’s successor, *PlusMimmi* (active 2013–2020), was authored by one of the two bloggers behind *More to Love*. *PlusMimmi*’s main themes were “plus-size clothing and where to find it ... [and] fashion, food, and interior design” (Hynnä & Kyrölä, 2019, p. 3). It did not focus on body positivity related matters as much as its predecessor did (but see Hynnä & Kyrölä, 2019, for more information).

²⁷ Marchant Aedo’s activist content formed part of Article II’s data set.

been written, drawing inspiration from fat studies as a discipline (e.g., Jaakkola, 2016; Juntunen, 2020; Pajala, 2005; Räisänen, 2021; Suikkanen, 2016) and/or specifically dealing with the Finnish body positivity movement (e.g., Kokko, 2018; Shemeikka, 2018).

The body positivity movement in Finland, in particular, has also been examined by Finnish fat studies scholars (Harjunen, 2019b; 2020b; 2023; Hynnä, 2018; 2019; Hynnä-Granberg, 2021b; 2022a; Hynnä & Kyrölä, 2019). Here the work of Hynnä-Granberg is of special interest. Hynnä-Granberg and I have conducted our respective studies during approximately the same time frame, and not only do we both research body positivity activism in Finland, but we also partly use the same data, namely content created for the Finnish Broadcasting Company's 2017 body positivity campaign the Scale Rebellion, as well as some podcasts produced by the Pehme Collective. We are both interested in ambivalences – or, differently put, “constant fluidity and contradictions” (Hynnä & Kyrölä, 2019, p. 8; see also Hynnä-Granberg, 2022a) – as well as the internal meaning negotiations (Hynnä-Granberg, 2021a) in Finnish body positive thinking and activism. We are also committed to looking at our respective topics through an intersectional lens, investigating the multiple intertwinings of larger-than-normative (Hynnä-Granberg, 2022b) embodiment, gender, and “race.” I must add, though, that my colleague's research design is even more ambitious, encompassing sexuality, class, and age as well (*ibid.*, p. 29).

Although our data²⁸ and time frame are quite alike, there are still some dissimilarities between our research approaches. Hynnä-Granberg is a media studies scholar whose primary interest lies in the affective dimensions present in body positive social media platforms. She studies “the way in which material bodies, mediated bodies, and media technologies come together and get entangled in practices” (University of Turku, n.d.). Her interests include affect, felt experience, and processes (Hynnä-Granberg, 2022b, p. 65) related to larger-than-normative embodiment, whereas I would estimate that I perceive fat embodiment as slightly more stable than she does.²⁹ Further, Hynnä-Granberg's work might more easily lend itself to practical applications: at the beginning of her doctoral dissertation (2022b, p. 7), she mentions she has started to plan a media education workshop based on her study findings, and as of 2023, these workshops have started to be realized (Hynnä-Granberg, 2023). This is a wonderful way to reach an even wider audience and make a valuable social impact.

²⁸ Unlike me, Hynnä-Granberg (2021b) collected data through interviews as well.

²⁹ I think this is at least partly due to studies showing that permanent weight loss is rare (e.g., Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, 2001).

3 ONLINE ACTIVISM, DATA, AND METHODS

3.1 Activism online

3.1.1 Background: Social media platforms and online activism

Social media companies are exactly that, companies. Their purpose is therefore to reap a financial profit for the shareholders. Although it might look like social media platforms exist to connect people to each other – for instance, Facebook’s slogan used to be “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life” – this is not their primary function (e.g., Nikunen, 2019). As commentators have pointed out (e.g., Lanier, 2019), social media users are not in fact customers but products. To be precise, the users’ time and attention is the product that is being sold to the real customers: those third parties who then advertise their products and services on the social media platforms.

Because the revenue generation model rests on the users’ attention, the companies want them to keep on scrolling as long as possible (in order for them to be exposed to as many advertisements as possible). It has surfaced that strong emotions, especially negative ones, are the best tactic to make users stay on a given platform (e.g., Jalonen, 2014). Approximately a decade ago already, researchers noted the tendency for online discussions, and social media discussions in particular, to polarize quickly (Paasonen, 2012; 2014). Writers both in Finland and abroad discuss this phenomenon through the prism of the ever-rising competition on the social media platforms: to gain visibility in an arena where only a handful of content producers or influencers survive and maintain their follower base, one needs to express provocative opinions to stand out from the crowd (e.g., Maasilta, 2012).

Within the confines of this work, the above observations apply particularly well to two articles, namely I and IV. Article I fittingly illustrates the general tendency of online discussions to quickly intensify. This no doubt holds true for blogs and their comment sections, but even more so for YouTube videos – the two types of online content used as data for the article. YouTube’s algorithms are

wired to give preference to such content which induces strong emotions (or affects; see, e.g., Karppi et al., 2016), and as said, the negative ones in particular (e.g., Sampson et al., 2018).

At the same time, these dynamics work in both directions, so to speak: it is not (only) that the operating logic of the platforms strongly encourages activists to continuously “up the ante” lest their content be ignored by the audience and the algorithms. Activists also seem to strategically use these very same conditions to their advantage, as in my opinion happens in several of the YouTube videos I analyzed for Article I. According to my interpretation, this situation is also reflected in Article IV, in which I propose that Sofie Hagen’s colorful, expletive-rich language might (at least partly) be motivated by her awareness of social media platforms’ operating logic and the need to stand out.

Against this backdrop, it is all the more interesting to notice that at times, Hagen chooses not to communicate with her audience as often as she could; for instance, she does not read all her Facebook comments. It appears evident that she knows that the more she engages with her followers, the more visibility she will get; yet she often decides to forego the opportunity. This, then, is an intriguing tactic that would seem to undermine her social media presence, but since it is her personal choice, it can be read as an exercise in agency.³⁰

3.1.2 The Internet, online platforms, and activism: Opportunities

At its most basic, the creation of online content only requires a digital device and an Internet connection. This translates to the relative democracy of activism – or in Nancy Thumim’s (2012, p. 5) words, “participatory online communities are undergoing a continuous struggle to make spaces for more democratic media production.” At the same time, though, connectivity, digital devices, and the skills to use those devices are not evenly distributed in Finland (e.g., Ahola & Hirvonen, 2021). Perhaps, then, it is more accurate to say that creating content aimed at online audiences (vs offline activities such as arranging demonstrations or other events) may lower the threshold of engaging in activism (Greijdanus et al., 2020).³¹

Related to this quite fair access to the digital means of production is the next step, namely the creation of the content itself. Compared to more traditional modes of activism such as writing an opinion piece for a newspaper³², online content allows for more in-the-moment self-expression partly because it lacks

³⁰ In the article itself, I read this choice mostly as a strategy to avoid experiencing anti-fat-ness. For more information, see subsection 4.4.

³¹ In footnote 14, I referred to Body Posi -messut, a live event arranged in Helsinki in early 2019. A noteworthy aspect of the Body Posi -messut was that it was one of the earliest of-line body positivity events taking place in Finland. Some others include the Body Pride Parade (Yle, 2017a) in 2017 and the 2016 theater monologue *FAT. A Greasy Monologue about Fatness* (translation by Kaisu Hynnä-Granberg, 2021a), performed by Raisa Omaheimo and directed by Elina Kilkku, which premiered at Theater Takomo, Helsinki. In fact, *FAT* constituted one of the landmarks to earn 2016 the title of “Year Zero” of the discourse on fat(ness) and body positivity in Finland, as mentioned in subsection 2.4.

³² It should be noted that Finnish body positivity activists have engaged in these modes of activism as well (Shemeikka et al., 2018).

gatekeepers such as moderators.³³ What is more, research has found that storytelling and self-representation (Williams, 2021) as well as creativity (Mendes et al., 2018) are important factors for why activists choose to do their work online.

Another opportunity provided by online activist content is its accessibility and reachability. While the activist only needs a connected device to produce content, the same goes for the audience to access that content. Taken on a new level with the use of hashtags (see, e.g., García-Mingo & Prieto Blanco, 2021; Rentschler, 2017; Williams, 2015) – still quite modest in the data analyzed for the dissertation at hand – the audience can engage with activists’ work no matter where they are and no matter at what time of day.³⁴ Fascinatingly, Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller (2018, p. 238) discovered that for many hashtag activism participants, an understanding arose (according to their research question) that sexual violence is not a personal problem but a structural one. This type of insight is reflected in Article I (pp. 28–29), in which the activist behind the YouTube channel *Nerdinplussize*, Minnaleena Jaakkola, makes the exact same point as regards body positivity activism.

In addition, online content created within the framework of feminist digital activism has the potential to reach wider and, simultaneously, more targeted audiences who are interested in and sympathetic to the activist cause. It can create possibilities for meaning contestations (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015; Loney-Howes et al., 2022; Zavattaro, 2021), sharing experiences (Williams, 2021), networks of feminist solidarity, and ultimately, even social change (Mendes et al., 2018), as well as facilitate the emergence of diverse voices in both local and global contexts (Nas, 2022). As Kyrölä (2021) has written:

Online communities and sites which focus on fat activism or body positivity should not be dismissed too quickly as a new form of consumerism, or forced “positivity.” In actual practice, many blogs, social media accounts and groups offer opportunities to support, community and practical solutions to issues such as dealing with discrimination and body anxiety, finding stylish clothes as well as romantic partners, and navigating through various everyday activities in a world that often excludes fat people. (p. 113)

³³ Nevertheless, my estimate is that much of the online content analyzed for this study was in fact prepared or scripted in beforehand, at least to some extent. This would contrast with Instagram Stories, for instance, which are often spontaneous snippets of the content creators’ lives, set to disappear within 24 hours of their publication. This is not to say that Instagram Stories are never scripted in advance. However, with the tendency for body positivity activist content to shift increasingly to social media platforms such as Instagram (Kyrölä, 2021, p. 113) and TikTok (e.g., Jennings, 2021), my impression is that the content becomes more ad hoc.

³⁴ This also facilitates familiarizing oneself with activist content produced outside the Finnish borders.

3.1.3 The Internet, online platforms, and activism: Limitations

For the research at hand, it is imperative to focus on the gendered implications of doing activism online and on social media. Certainly, the misogyny that is expressed on the web is a reflection of the misogyny present in society at large, and it translates to the World Wide Web environment in some specific ways. For instance, both men and women have experienced harassment online, but the gendered grounds for harassment only hold for women. In other words, for harassment to occur, it is enough for one to be a woman, whereas this is not true for men (Bladini, 2017; Nieminen & Vehkoo, 2017, p. 97). With the majority of body positivity activists identifying as not men, this is a pertinent issue.

The harassment that women face differs from that experienced by men. Often, it contains sexualizing undertones and allusions to one's identity (Nieminen & Vehkoo, 2017, p. 146). Particularly young and minority women are targeted more often than men. In the face of pejorative comments, vitriol, trolling (e.g., Jane, 2014; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017), and outright online hate (e.g., Nas, 2022), many women choose to either self-censor (e.g., Ging & Siapera, 2018) or leave the Internet altogether to protect themselves (e.g., Nieminen & Vehkoo, 2017, p. 98).

This has happened in the body positivity/fat activism movement, too. For instance, as shown in Article IV, Sofie Hagen does not read many of the comments she receives on social media, thus also missing those messages that contain words of encouragement. Several long-time fat activist bloggers have decided to retire from their platforms due to burnout resulting from being at the receiving end of hate speech (on the labor of digital feminist activism more generally, see Mendes et al., 2018). In addition, as I have discussed in Article IV, it is possible that the high occurrence of hate comments may repel aspiring activists from ever engaging with the movement out of fear that they, too, might receive out-of-line feedback.

Several Finnish women who are active online and were interviewed for the journalistic comic *Vihan ja inhon internet* (*The Internet of Hate and Loathing*; Nieminen & Vehkoo, 2017) point out that the online hate they receive is not as much personal as it is directed at women who express their opinions in general (ibid., p. 28). According to Tuija Saresma (ibid., p. 87), "when women are unruly, they are no longer deserving of protection," and this applies to the context of racism and misogyny in particular. To add embodiment to the aforementioned intersections, many women reported being called names such as "*nelisilmäläski*" ("a four-eyed fatso"; ibid., p. 20) and "*ruma, tyhmä ja läski*" ("ugly, stupid, and fat"; ibid., p. 25), which affirmed the negative stereotypes commonly attached to fat bodies.

A related, problematic issue is the online platforms' censorship of activist content. This has been the case both in Finland (e.g., Pulkkinen, 2020) and abroad (e.g., Krishnan, 2021). Although this dissertation does not include data collected from Instagram, body positivity activism has since moved significantly to that platform, and its methods of operating merit mentioning. In their bachelor's thesis, Sanni Pulkkinen (2020, n.p.) concludes that "Instagram can delete images

from the platform *even if they are not against the rules of the platform*. ... censorship is affected by the user's gender and marginalized body, which means that users who deviate from traditional beauty ideals are under-represented on Instagram" (my emphasis).

Another type of censorship is what happens to particularly fat Black women's visual content: being inherently racist and anti-fat, the platform's (in this case, Instagram's) algorithm does not recognize these bodies (e.g., Williams, 2021). One of Sherri Williams' (ibid., p. 1369) research participants calls this suppression and mentions posting less since the audience does not see their posts because of the algorithmic logic. In other words, their posts' invisibility discourages fat Black women from posting (ibid.; see also Loney-Howes et al., 2022).

3.2 Study data

3.2.1 Description of the data

I present the research data used for Articles I-IV (a) in a condensed table (see Table 2 below) and (b) more descriptively in this subsection by comparing the activists' content to each other, teasing out some similarities and differences. For now, I exclude Article IV and discuss Sofie Hagen's work later in this subsection.

As a general note, my aim in this study was to analyze a rather extensive array of content produced by activists. I wanted to gain an overall understanding of what was happening in the Finnish body positivity movement "scene" during its early years 2015–2020. Since there was not a lot of previous research on the topic, I chose to compromise on depth and focus on width. Consequently, future researchers would do well in focusing on activists' work through more detailed case studies.

TABLE 2 Main online research material in alphabetical order

Name of activist and/or channel	Format of online data	URL address	Short description of content ³⁵	Data from year(s)	Sample size
Body Posi Suomi ry (registered association) ³⁶	Blog post	N/A (defunct)	The blog posts reflected the association's overall purpose to maintain and support a positive body image and advance Finnish mental health work (https://www.facebook.com/bodyposisuomi/).	2018	5
Sofie Hagen	Facebook photo caption	https://fi-fi.facebook.com/sofiehagen.komiker	A variety of topics; only fat activism related captions were analyzed. Textual diversity at several levels, such as length and tone (e.g., humorous/more serious).	2015–2020	537 ³⁷
Minnaleena Jaakkola/Nerdinplussize	YouTube video	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCItpY2IkCFoXxqd0QMvWmA (defunct except for two videos)	Focus on intersectionality. Calm and well-rounded argumentation; dry humor.	2017–2018	51
Jenny Lehtinen/the Scale Rebellion	Column	https://yle.fi/aihe/kategoria/vaakapina/jenny-elamanmuutos	Vivid; up close and personal. Exaggeration to get the point across.	2017	13
Javiera Marchant Aedo	Blog post	https://nayteikunasankareita.wordpress.com	An explicitly activist viewpoint; intersectionality. Well-thought-out argumentation.	2015–2018	48

³⁵ I have named the activists and their channels or other content outlets (where applicable) so as not to efface their role as pioneers in the Finnish body positivity movement. However, when I describe their content in this column, I am doing only that. In other words, I am not describing the person or persona who has produced the content. This applies equally to all my subsequent analyses of activist content.

³⁶ Body Posi Suomi ry's website is not functional, and while its Facebook page is still visible, it was last updated in late 2019. I am uncertain whether the association is currently active. Organized action for equal rights for all embodiments continues in Finland, however: the country's first explicitly fat liberationist NGO will be holding its founding meeting in July 2023 (J. Marchant Aedo, personal communication, June 15, 2023).

³⁷ In reality, the number of the captions analyzed is not this high. As I write in Article IV (p. 138), "I selected data from among the 537 timeline photos on Hagen's Facebook business page with the criterion that photo captions be written in English." Especially before 2015, the primary language Hagen used in the captions was Danish. Unfortunately, I do not have exact information on the ratio between the English and Danish captions, but I estimate that out of a total of 537 captions, approximately 150 were in Danish and were thus excluded from this study.

Onnellinen siili	YouTube video	N/A (defunct)	Actively looking for common ground; diffusing antagonism. Reflective.	2018	39
Saga Raippalinna	Blog post	https://sagaraia.com	Calm and well-rounded argumentation. Reflective; sharing personal experiences.	2017–2018	43
Tytti Shemeikka/Vatsamielenosoitus	YouTube video	https://www.youtube.com/c/Vatsamielenosoitus	Flamboyant; sassy; up close and personal.	2018	38
Caroline Suinner and Meriam Trabelsi/Pehme Collective	Podcast	https://www.ruskeattytot.fi/podcast-pehme	Intersectionality; sharing personal experiences. Humorous.	2018	5

I begin with the contents' similarities. Naturally, the general subject matter, fatness and body positivity, is the same although different emphases can be found. All the activists identify either as (i) female, (ii) a queer person (*queerihminen*), or (iii) folk (*tyyppi*), not putting emphasis on their gender in these latter two cases. Viewed from another angle, none of the activists identify as male. Assuredly, men are not excluded from the societal expectations to be thin or not fat (e.g., Monaghan, 2008). However, as discussed earlier, in light of the prevailing gendered body norms whereby fatness is more stigmatizing for women than men, it is understandable that the body positivity movement's message would resonate more with those who do not identify as men.

I estimate that, with a few exceptions, the activists are young adults, between 25 and 35 years of age. All the research material was published in online format, be the specific platform a website such as that of the Yle broadcasting company, a blogging site such as WordPress, or a social media site such as YouTube. The language was Finnish.³⁸ As pointed out, all the material had been published within the same time frame, 2015–2020, and many of the activists quoted each other and/or had visited each others' "home bases," whether a blog, a podcast, or a YouTube channel.

Let us now turn to some differences between the contents. As noted, even though the activists' basic focus is the same, their emphases within the subject matter do differ. For instance, intersectionality is an important aspect in some activists' work, whereas others rarely discuss it. Similarly, though not entirely equivalently, the activists' ethnic or national identification differs: some activists identify as Brown or Chilean, for instance, and it is often the same people who have intersectionality high on their activist agenda. At the same time, the relevance of intersecting differences is also talked about by some of the activists

³⁸ A suggestion for future research would be to investigate non-Finnish language body positivity content produced in the Finnish context. Some possibilities besides the other official languages of the country, i.e., Swedish and the three Sámi languages, include Russian, Estonian, and Arabic, the next three most spoken languages in the country as of 2021 (Statistics Finland, 2021), as well as the Finnish and Finland-Swedish sign languages.

who, although potentially identifying with “whiteness” and/or “Finnishness,” do not explicitly address it in their content (a sign of privilege in itself?).

Another point of divergence in the research material is the use of discursive strategies and the overall tone of the contents produced – I have offered some descriptions of these in Table 2. Finally, although online publishing is what connects all the data, the contents’ respective formats or media do vary: in my quest for data breadth, I included content that had been produced in text (e.g., columns, blog posts), audiovisual (video), or audio (podcasts) format.

I will now briefly turn to Article IV – the one that discusses Sofie Hagen’s fat activist work – to compare its data set with those of the first three articles on the Finnish body positivity movement. The Facebook photo captions produced by Hagen deal with the same subject matter as the Finnish activists’ oeuvre. The publication time frame is also approximately the same. Hagen’s content was published online, but the language was English instead of Finnish, and the cultural contexts she addresses are not, understandably, Finnish. Hagen’s age falls within the same range as most of the Finns’ age, and her gender identification is nonbinary: as she wrote in a tweet, “My pronouns are whatever. She/they/he, whatever you want” (Hagen, 2020). She is white and able-bodied.³⁹

3.2.2 Ethics of online data gathering

In recent years, humanities and social sciences have paid increasing attention to ethical questions in research. For instance, ethical codes of conduct have been drafted for those who gather data from online sources (e.g., Kosonen et al., 2018; TENK, 2021). According to Finnish law, scientific research does not always require consent for the processing of personal data. The Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman (n.d.a) states: “[p]ersonal data can be processed for research also on other processing bases than consent. The basis for processing can be a legal provision (e.g. sections 4 and 6 of the Data Protection Act [hereafter DPA]) or the controller’s legitimate interest.” The DPA (1050/2018), in turn, “specifies and supplements the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation” (Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman, n.d.b). In other words, the DPA is part of national legislation.

The above-mentioned section 4 of the DPA states that “[p]ersonal data may be processed in accordance with point (e) of Article 6(1) of the Data Protection

³⁹ A pre-examiner of this dissertation raised the question of what supplementing the existing data with activist interviews might have yielded in terms of knowledge production and different forms of activism. Indeed, as Salli Hakala and Juho Vesa (2013, p. 223) have pointed out, using online material only does not allow for the researcher to ask additional or clarifying questions, for instance. In other words, the researcher must mainly stick to what surfaces in the activist content and exercise caution in interpreting that which does not (ibid., pp. 223–224). Since my research centered around the content, or media texts, produced by activists, as well as how they convey different forms of resistance, I did not deem interviews necessary for this study. However, this suggestion – interviewing activists to learn more about their experiences – certainly makes for an excellent topic for future research and is in line with the feminist goal of amplifying marginalized people’s voices.

Regulation if ... the processing is *necessary for scientific or historical research purposes* or statistical purposes and it is proportionate to the aim of public interest pursued" (my emphasis; Ministry of Justice, 2018). Furthermore, as of May 25, 2018, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies in all Member States (EUR-Lex, 2018), which means it must be observed in addition to national legislation. However, point (e) of Article 6(1), referred to in the DPA above, does not offer surprises since the Finnish law has been harmonized with the GDPR: "data controllers can legally process personal data for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller" (GDPRhub, n.d.).

I did most of the data gathering for my dissertation around the time the GDPR was entering into force. As a member of the scientific community, I was therefore very aware of how important it was to implement it properly. However, there were also other pertinent research ethics related issues to address: asking for informed consent; the private/public distinction; and the potential vulnerability of those researched.⁴⁰

As described above, I did not ask for informed consent from the activists. They are public figures (or micro-celebrities, as Hynnä-Granberg [2022b, p. 59] has put it) who have chosen to engage in activism on public fora. It is therefore reasonable to assume that they want to reach as wide an audience as possible and do not wish for their content to remain private. This assumption is backed up by the fact that the activists, with one exception, reveal their first and family names to their audience.⁴¹

A closely related topic is that of the private/public distinction (e.g., Rosenberg, 2010). A crucial theme in Internet research already before the turn of the millennium (see, e.g., Turtiainen & Östman, 2013), the central claim here is that although data might be readily available online, the mere availability does not automatically mean that it is directed at a wider audience (franzke et al., 2020). To decide on the intended degree of publicness of the content, the researcher needs to carefully estimate how intimate and how sensitive it is (Turtiainen & Östman, 2013, p. 51).

One avenue to do this is to get thoroughly acquainted with the research setting – in this case, the online platforms on which activists publish content. It is by familiarizing oneself with the typical topics and language use that the researcher is able to eventually gauge whether particular contents are meant to be private or public. I had been following anglophone body positive and fat activist content at least from 2009 onward and also spent a considerable amount of time perusing Finnish body positivity activists' content. Thus, I gained a good understanding of the various communicative practices used and concluded that the contents were meant to be public.

Finally, I did my best to assess the potential vulnerability/ies of those being researched. As the Association of Internet Researchers' Ethical Guidelines (2020,

⁴⁰ My heartfelt thanks to Kaisu Hynnä-Granberg for all the excellent points on research ethics!

⁴¹ This rendered the anonymization of the activists' personal data unnecessary but made it necessary to comply with the GDPR.

p. 17) states, a “primary ethical imperative is to avoid harm” as well as to take into account that “the greater the vulnerability of our subjects, the greater our responsibility and obligation to protect them from likely harms” (ibid.). In addition, I was aware of the feminist research ethics principle to not only refrain from causing harm but also, to the extent possible, “be beneficial to the people involved” (franzke, 2020, p. 71).

Again, spending a large amount of time on the platforms and educating myself on the customary ways of the activists, as well as the reach of their work, led me to conclude that I would not do harm to them by researching their content and publishing in academic journals, even when using direct quotes. They were already “in the world,” doing their activist work – that is how I, too, found them in the first place. This study might not be directly beneficial to the activists, as per franzke’s (2020) call, but I have done my best to cause no harm.

To conclude this subsection, I want to briefly touch on data ephemeralization, or content removal by the activists themselves, from a research ethics point of view. This is even more pertinent given that not only one but several activists have chosen to disable or delete some or all of their online content after I had consulted it for research purposes (cf. subsection 1.3). I became aware of these content removals after my research articles had already been published.

Of course, I do not know in actual fact why the contents were removed; assumedly, there were several reasons. Possible explanations might include: (i) the content did not reflect the activists’ current opinions; (ii) the content was experienced as too personal; and/or (iii) the activists (still) received negative feedback because of the content.⁴² If all or any of these assumptions are accurate, it could be argued that my use of direct quotes from the activist content in the research articles was not an entirely sound choice ethically. After all, publishing direct excerpts from the media texts has extended their lifespan beyond what the activist(s) would have wished, given that they did disable or entirely remove content from their respective platforms.

However, the use of quotes in qualitative research is commonplace, and, among other things, it serves to “support researcher claims, illustrate ideas, illuminate experience, evoke emotion, and provoke response” (Sandelowski, 1994, p. 479). I would like to present three motivations for the use of direct quotes in my research articles. First, they allow the activists’ own voices to be heard, “raw and real” (although I did translate the excerpts from Finnish into English in Article III; on the centrality of translation in qualitative research, see, e.g., Yunus et al., 2022). Giving space to research participants is a central value in feminist research. Second, quoting activists directly brings richness and depth to the study, which is important in qualitative research endeavors overall. Third, direct quotes aid the reader to differentiate between the activists’ content and my

⁴² The rationale may also be considerably less personal, such as the effort and/or potential cost of maintaining an online platform. I thank Kaisu Hynnä-Granberg for this – and other related – pertinent remark(s).

interpretation of that content. Pursuing transparency is an important consideration in research ethics.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Research paradigm

Paradigms, as sets of basic beliefs, are not open to proof in any conventional sense. ... the sets of answers given are in all cases human constructions ... No construction is or can be incontrovertibly right; advocates of any particular construction must rely on persuasiveness and utility rather than proof in arguing their position. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108; see also Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002)

For the sake of transparency, I begin this section by disclosing my “basic beliefs” as a researcher – or the paradigmatic considerations which form the foundation of all my subsequent methodological choices. In my opinion, individuals have agency, which interacts with external circumstances. I call this being situatedly intentional: on one hand, based on an assessment of a specific situation, an individual makes a decision on how to act. For instance, activists can and do exercise their agency by taking action that contradicts norms. On the other hand, their agency is not sovereign or unbounded; rather, it operates at a moment in time, itself shaped by a myriad of variables.

As stated, a study’s paradigmatic choices inform the ensuing methodological commitments. This dissertation is based on an emancipatory paradigm (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005, pp. 54–55; Olesen, 1994). The paradigm pays attention to how power operates in society, and how, through heightened understanding, those in the margins can be empowered to change the inequalities they face (Ford-Gilboe et al., 1995). With their critical inquiry into gendered (and other) power relations, feminist epistemology and theory building sit well with the emancipatory paradigm; in fact, among themselves, feminist theorists have for quite a long time talked about the emancipatory interest of knowledge as the basis of feminist epistemology.

According to Mary Ellsberg and Lori Heise (2005, p. 55), emancipatory (or critical, as they can also be called) researchers’ “underlying goal is to contribute to social change.” I recognize this ambition to be present in my own work, too. At the same time, I am aware that one study can only achieve so much, and what is more, the topic of this dissertation has not yet been widely studied. Therefore, I have adopted exploratory research as my overall research approach.

Exploratory research is particularly suited for topics in which previous research is relatively sparse (Swedberg, 2020). As Pertti Alasuutari (1999, p. 25) has written, it is important to be willing to make full use of all the theories and methods that could yield in-depth knowledge on the phenomenon under investigation. Instead of a focus on “theoretical orthodoxy” (ibid.), Alasuutari calls for such a use of theories *and methods* which serves to provide new aspects

of reality (my emphasis). The writer further exhorts scholars in humanities and social sciences not to repeat accepted truths but to discover novel viewpoints on the researched topic and contribute to the public discussion by bringing them forward. It is musings like these that have helped me to decide on the exploratory research approach, itself compatible with the emancipatory research paradigm.

3.3.2 Methodology and sampling

In this dissertation, I use case study methodology (CSM) – and more specifically, multiple case study methodology (see, e.g., Stewart, 2012). Drawing on the work of renowned CSM scholar Robert K. Yin (2004), June M. Verner and Lili Marziana Abdullah (2012, p. 870) point out that CSM is useful “to observe, explain, and explore ... phenomena within their real-life setting.” In other words, CSM and the exploratory research approach are compatible in their aims (see Reiter, 2013). In addition, applying CSM to the chosen data set is well suited to gain insight into key aspects of the phenomenon I am interested in, the sundry resistances that body positivity activists engage in.

Just as my use of CSM was informed by the study’s research questions, so too was the selection of my data collection method. Because the vast majority of early Finnish body positivity activism took place online, it was logical to collect the data from the Internet. I used purposeful sampling (e.g., Palinkas et al., 2015), and more specifically something I call algorithm-aided snowball sampling. Instead of the original idea of snowball sampling, whereby interviewees are asked to suggest whom the researcher could talk to next, here it was search engine technology that facilitated the discovery of other activists once I had come across the first ones, Jenny Lehtinen and Tytti Shemeikka.

I interpret the online content produced by the body positivity activists as linguistic cultural products (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). Indeed, the content sheds light on two culturally relevant sides of the proverbial coin: (1) what the prevailing societal ways to talk about fatness and related activism are; and (2) how activists question, challenge, and resist these discourses. To regard the study data as specifically linguistic cultural products is justified since I treat all the data as text, no matter in which medium it was originally produced, excluding from analysis such factors as facial gestures and tone of voice.

3.3.3 Data analysis methods

I employ several different, yet interrelated, methods of data analysis in this dissertation. The selected qualitative methods are in line with the study’s paradigm, research approach, and methodology. The methods’ primary purpose is, so to speak, to separate the wheat from the chaff – that is, to pull out those pertinent-to-the-research-questions pieces of data that, while highly relevant to the research problem, are simultaneously rich and nuanced.

For the sake of clarity, I have employed the Roman numerals I-III for the articles of this dissertation to indicate each type of resistance in accordance with Tovar’s (2017) model, proceeding from a more general level toward the most

individual level: extra-movement (I), intra-movement (II), and internal (III). However, in order to better understand my choices of methods, it is useful to know that this enumeration does not follow the publication order of the articles. Chronologically, the articles were worked on and published in the following order: Article III, Article I, Article II, and Article IV.

Knowing this, it becomes easier to follow the research process, in which I first familiarized myself with qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis (as pointed out, Article III in this dissertation). I then proceeded to reparative reading and discursive strategies (here Article I). Finally, I explored dialogic thematic analysis and used it for the remaining two articles (II and IV). This information is also summarized below in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Methods of analysis used in the original publications

Method of analysis	Article #
Qualitative content analysis	III
Discourse analysis	III
Discursive strategies	I
Reparative reading	I
Dialogic thematic analysis	II IV

3.3.3.1 Qualitative content analysis

The first of the data analysis methods is qualitative content analysis (see, e.g., Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). Following Ulla-Maija Salo (2015), I regard qualitative content analysis – or content analysis (CA) for short – more as a preparatory method than a method used for data analysis per se. This is because without the preliminary thematizing and typologization of data (Saaranen & Puusniekka, 2006) with the help of CA, the subsequent phases of analysis could not be achieved (Salo, 2015, p. 166; p. 169; p. 171, among others).

In Article III (p. 65), I quote Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon (2005) to elucidate the rationale behind my choice to use CA: according to them, it “focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (p. 1278). I was drawn to qualitative content analysis in particular because it “is not (only) concerned with counting occurrences; rather, it aims to probe into the meaning of the words, subsequently grouping them by shared similarities,” as I write in Article III (p. 65). CA seemed to be a good launching pad for discourse analysis, the other method of analysis I employed in Article III. I will discuss discourse analysis in more depth below.

Although Article III is the only one of the original publications in which I explicitly utilize qualitative content analysis, the method has arguably been used in all the other articles as well. For instance, the first phase of dialogic thematic analysis is “to begin by finding such utterances in the text under study which are

meaningful from the perspective of theoretical thinking and the research questions” (Koski, 2011, p. 136; translation AP). Leena Koski does not name this phase “content analysis” specifically, but without first analyzing the contents of the text (e.g., the denotations of the words), it would be quite difficult to determine their meaningfulness to the task at hand. In fact, the same holds true for discourse analysis and reparative reading, too: as said, CA actually enables the use of other subsequent analysis methods.⁴³

3.3.3.2 Discourse analysis and discursive strategies

If I view CA as a preparatory method, then discourse analysis (DA) could be dubbed a textual analysis method to draw attention to where the chief interest of the analysis lies: I treat all the study data as text. DA was employed in Article III, in which the data was constituted of written text only: the 13 columns written by Jenny Lehtinen, the figurehead of the Scale Rebellion. Discursive strategies (themselves springing from DA, especially critical discourse analysis⁴⁴ [see, e.g., Wodak & Meyer, 2009]), in turn, were used as a method of analysis in Article I, in which the emphasis was on activists’ resistant tactics against the critics of the movement.

It might be useful to think of DA as an umbrella term instead of a specific method since its use varies a lot. For instance, the concept of “discourse” has been interpreted in a multitude of ways in different strands of DA (e.g., Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). As a matter of fact, Arja Jokinen and colleagues (2016, p. 25) go as far as to state that “it is not meaningful to characterize [DA] as a research method with clear-cut boundaries ... instead, it is a *loose theoretical framework*” (emphasis in original; translation AP). While I have approached DA as a method in this dissertation, it is good to keep this “looseness” in mind.

According to Sari Pietikäinen and Anne Mäntynen (2019, p. 32), DA brings together humanities and social sciences: within it, linguistic resources and the choices regarding their use (i.e., humanities) intertwine with the larger interactive, institutional, and societal context (i.e., social sciences). Since my academic background is an amalgam of humanities and social sciences, it is perhaps even more appropriate to understand DA in this way. In addition, the special issues of the journals in which the two articles were published –

⁴³ In hindsight, “qualitative content analysis” is perhaps a synonym for something I very intuitively did with the data: after coming across the research material, I first glanced through it, then read it more carefully, narrowing the focus (with the chosen theoretical framework and the research questions in mind) with every new round of reading. See also subsection 3.3.3.4.

⁴⁴ A pre-examiner of this dissertation brought up the potential of positive discourse analysis (PDA; e.g., Martin, 2004), especially in conjunction with reparative reading (Sedgwick, 2003; see next subsection). This is an excellent point since both PDA and reparative reading advocate reconstruction in addition to deconstruction: not only stating what is (and has been) wrong, but what is (and might be) right. As James R. Martin (2004, pp. 183–184) writes, “What concerns me most in arguing for constructive research is to undo ... [a] disjunction in 20th-century social science and humanities research which systematically elides the study of social processes which make the world a better place in favour of critique of processes which disempower and oppress. ... The lack of positive discourse analysis (PDA) cripples our understanding of how change happens, for the better, across a range of sites.”

Sukupuolentutkimus–Genusforskning (“Gender Studies”) and *Fat Studies*, respectively – had somewhat different foci. In their call for papers, the Finnish journal was looking for contributions from Finnish-speaking scholars working on gender and linguistics related topics. The special issue of *Fat Studies*, on the other hand, was entitled *Theorizing Fat Oppression: Intersectional Approaches and Methodological Innovations*.

All of the above was reflected in how I envisaged DA and discursive strategies in the two articles. To follow Pietikäinen and Mäntynen’s (2019, pp. 312–317) typology of the principal DA foci, the foremost ones in this study were (a) contextual choices and consequences in Article III and (b) linguistic choices in Article I. Using the “variant” of DA in which contextual choices and consequences are emphasized (*ibid.*, pp. 316–317) led me to concentrate on the Finnish context as well as the larger “discourses circulating in contemporary Finnish society and elsewhere” (Article III, p. 70). In contrast, when viewed through the prism of linguistic choices, DA is concerned with a minute and detailed analysis of language, including the examination of vocabulary and semantic meanings (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, pp. 314–315). This comes very close to how I used DA in Article I, in accordance with the journal issue’s focus on the intersection of linguistics and gender.

3.3.3.3 Reparative reading

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) influential text “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” turns twenty this year, yet it continues to be one of queer studies’ seminal contributions within its own ambit as well as in many other academic disciplines (e.g., Hennessy, 2017; Karkulehto & Rossi, 2017). Tuula Juvonen (2014, p. 120) has described Sedgwick’s thinking as an optimistic research approach, characterized by non-normativity, non-duality, and non-linearity.

In her text, Sedgwick (2003) discusses two ways of knowing and producing new knowledge. One of them, termed paranoid reading, is inspired by Paul Ricœur’s thinking on the hermeneutics of suspicion. According to Juvonen (2014, p. 119), paranoid reading assumes that the marginalization of the oppressed happens “always already,” which leaves little room to imagine alternative trajectories. As Juvonen (2020, p. 2) puts it: “... those leaning towards paranoid readings already know there is something wrong with the world. In this case, they lay bare the myriad ways in which ... normative hierarchies [are created] by excluding and othering that which is labelled *queer*” (emphasis in original).

Another kind of epistemic practice is reparative reading, which entails an openness toward futures whose directions are not yet known, and which can therefore take surprising – including positive – turns (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 146). Trajectories are contingent, that is, they are not predestined to go on as they have in the past, and thus they can turn out better. Toward the end of her essay, Sedgwick (*ibid.*, p. 147) points out that because of its myopic nature, the paranoid optic may render invisible or illegible “a wealth of characteristic, culturally

central practices, many of which can well be called reparative, that emerge from queer experience.”

The above quote summarizes my rationale for using reparative reading in Article I. As I mention in the article, I had noticed a paranoid (in the Sedgwickian sense) tone in my interpretation of the data: I had assumed that there “always already” existed a deadlocked antagonism between the activists and their critics. In other words, I recognized in myself the need for a different type of reading as a researcher. Sedgwick (ibid., p. 150) underlines that it is not people but *practices* that “can be divided between the paranoid and the reparative,” so I knew that another kind of angle was possible. In the end, two out of the four discursive strategies presented in Article I, seeking harmony and introspection, were distilled using reparative reading.

3.3.3.4 Dialogic thematic analysis

The last of the data analysis methods is dialogic thematic analysis (DTA), which I used as the primary method of analysis in Articles II and IV. As its name implies, DTA concerns itself with the continuous exchange – or dialogue – between pertinent elements of the research process: theoretical and methodological thinking, empirical data, contextual knowledge related to the study topic, earlier research, and the researcher’s own understanding (Koski, 2011, p. 127). In a later work, Koski (2020, pp. 157–172) condensed the practical application of DTA into three stages: (i) familiarization with the research material, (ii) formulation of the initial content categories, and (iii) solidification of these early categories into themes.

Looking back, I would venture that I opted for DTA in the latter part of my research process because it incorporated those aspects I had found to be of value in CA and DA in the earlier stages. On one hand, I had come to realize the importance of carefully arranging the data into themes, which is often at least implied in CA. On the other hand, my understanding of the central role of language and text as carriers of meaning had consolidated to a greater extent, which is compatible with how I approach DA.

Another reason to choose DTA in the later articles was probably the amount of liberty it grants to the researcher (Koski, 2011, p. 148). With two publications under my belt and a better understanding of the phenomenon under study, I was in all likelihood more comfortable with a method that allowed for more flexibility. Having said that, in both Articles II and IV, I did keep to Koski’s (2011; 2020) “instructions” by first formulating some initial content categories (not yet themes *per se*) and then proceeding to form proper themes.

Finally, I will detail how DTA differs from other qualitative methods of analysis as per the originator of DTA, professor emerita Leena Koski (personal communication, July 24, 2020). First, DTA is a pragmatic approach that can be applied to any qualitative research question, data set, methodology, or theoretical thinking. The use of DTA can be theory-driven, data-driven, or anything between the two. Second, DTA also aspires to include the steps after the analysis is ready, that is, how to continue to the interpretations and

conclusions. Third, DTA makes the point that ultimately, the only real research method is the researcher's systematic and insightful theoretical thinking; it is the space that gives rise to dialogue. Koski (ibid.) notes that DTA is purposely not termed a "theoretical framework": this is because theoretical thinking is not a frame around research – it is a research method in itself.

3.4 Researcher positionality

New researchers should also acknowledge that, while engaging in reflexive practice and articulating their positionality is not a guarantee of higher quality research, that through doing so, they should become a better researcher. (Darwin Holmes, 2020, p. 8)

In the text at hand, I have already addressed some issues pertaining to ethical considerations as a researcher. One example can be found in subsection 3.2.2, in which I discuss the ethics of online data gathering. Another instance is subsection 3.3.1, which details the research paradigm I apply in this study. I will now focus on my researcher positionality.

I first attempt to clarify my situatedness on the activist-researcher continuum. This bears particular relevance since fat activism and fat studies share a long history: "The domain of the fat activist has often been to usher in fat liberation at the site of the individual body. Fat Studies scholars engage in a similar quest for liberation, focusing more on sites and domains of the academy, such as conferences" (Pausé & Taylor, 2021, p. 6; see also Read, 2021). Activism and scholarship are intimately intertwined: for instance, activists frequently refer to studies done in the fields of fat studies and gender studies, among others, and employ concepts derived from those fields, such as intersectionality. Although I identify as fat, White, and a cis woman, and thus do share identity markers with many of the body positivity activists studied in this work, I am not an "insider" to the movement. In other words, I do not identify as an activist but as a scholar (cf. Lee & McAvan, 2021, p. 188).⁴⁵

At the same time, I consider it an important facet of this study that remaining an outsider vis-à-vis the movement facilitates a perhaps more all-around analysis and reflection of the activists' online content. For instance, I do not know any of the activists personally. Even though I do not aim for objectivity in this study (see, e.g., Haraway, 1988), I recognize that being close friends with the activists, for example, would probably have had an impact on the interpretations I make and publicly offer. Simultaneously, however, this "outsider" status translates to my analyses not being as in-depth as they might otherwise have been. Cooper's (2012; 2021) work on fat activism is a good example of the richness acquired through autoethnography as well as through

⁴⁵ This does not mean that I take a value-neutral stance on the societal marginalization of fat people. Quite the contrary: I do not condone it and want to see the current situation change. The philosophical basis of this work, the emancipatory paradigm, is compatible with this desire.

interviewing fellow activists who are also the activist-researcher's friends. Indeed, I would be delighted to see more research done by those involved in the Finnish body positivity movement (in addition to Jaakkola, 2016, and Shemeikka, 2018) especially since "fat activists themselves have offered few reflective or analytic accounts that deal with the depth and breadth of what they do" (Cooper, 2012, p. 5). All such complementary contributions would be needed and welcome: those by activists, those by researchers, and those by activist-researchers.

My identifying as a fat, White, and cis female also means that I do *not* share identity markers with some of the activists whose contents I study in this dissertation. As a researcher, it is important not to assume that my personal identification is somehow a universal – and thereby sufficient – position from which to approach the topic under discussion. Indeed, not only body positivity and fat activism but also fat studies have been criticized for mainly being the "territory" of (moderately) fat, White, and cis females (e.g., Daufin, 2020; Lind, 2020; Zerafa, 2022). This potential myopia of mine is further compounded by my middle-class background since observers have pointed out that the desire for thinness and engagement in weight-loss regimes are closely tied to being middle class (see, e.g., Skeggs, 1997).

4 ARTICLE SUMMARIES

This section consists of the summaries of the four original articles. I have attempted to draft them in a concise yet informative manner as they are particularly aimed at those readers who cannot access the articles due to a linguistic barrier and/or academic paywalls. In addition, the content of the summaries has been guided by the research questions laid out in subsection 1.1, except in the case of Article IV: the reflections related to the fourth research question appear in subsection 5.4 “Convergences in resistance? A cross-cultural comparison.”

4.1 Article I: Body positivity activists’ replies to criticism

The first original article was entitled “Suomalaisten kehopositiivisuusaktivistien vastineet kehopositiivisuuden kritiikkiin – Analyysi diskursiivisista strategioista”.⁴⁶ It was published in *Sukupuolentutkimus–Genusforskning* (a journal dedicated to gender studies in Finland) in 2019 (volume 32, issue 4). Article I’s principal interest lay in how anti-fat bias is resisted in relation to those who criticize the movement and are situated “outside” of it.

The data consisted of blog posts (n=48) and YouTube videos (n=128) produced by body positivity activists working in Finland. With the help of discursive strategy analysis (Carvalho, 2005), I distilled four different discursive strategies from the data. All these strategies can be viewed as resistance, each in its own way.

The first two strategies, confrontation and instruction, were perhaps the most closely connected since they both involved direct counterspeech aimed at outsider critics of the movement, whose background is often in the health and wellness industry. In the activist content, the confrontation strategy was characterized by expressions of disagreement, frustration, and even rage. In

⁴⁶ Translation: “How do Finnish body positivity activists reply to their critics? A discursive strategy analysis.”

comparison, the instruction strategy was more analytical in tone and aimed to “educate” the critics so that they would gain a deeper understanding of the movement’s core tenets. Of note here is the important, albeit probably unintended, *contribution* of the critics toward the movement: by voicing their concerns on several occasions, the skeptics provide constant opportunities for the activists to articulate the cornerstones of the movement (cf. Benford & Snow, 2000).⁴⁷

The third strategy with which anti-fat bias was resisted in Article I was seeking harmony. The attempt to find common ground with the disparagers may at first glance seem like an antithesis to activist resistance; however, seeking harmony is not about submission or complying with the critics. Rather, this strategy avoids antagonizing the critics and invests in good communication instead. By seeking harmony, the activists aspire to create a supportive atmosphere in which constructive conversations can take place, and mutual learning consequently becomes possible. I would argue that ultimately, this strategy is also about resistance since its purpose is to spread the activist message via yet another route.⁴⁸

The final discursive strategy, introspection, comes close to expressions of ambivalence (see subsection 5.3 “Intrapersonal resistance”). In my reading of Article I through the lens of resisting anti-fat bias, the importance of introspection lies in the activists’ re-interpretation of the critics’ position. That is, introspection allows for a reflection on the prevailing anti-fatness attitudes and the fear of fat; it permits the observation that eventually, criticism springs from societal stereotypes and not from isolated cases of individual prejudice. Such recognition of the systemic nature of anti-fat bias, then, enables a more nuanced resistance on the activists’ part: for instance, the criticisms can be responded to at a general level instead of necessarily addressing the doubters personally.

4.2 Article II: Hyper(in)visibility in online body positivity activism

The second original article was “Rodullistettujen naisten lihavuusaktivismi internetissä - Hypernäkyvyys ja hypernäkyttömyys kehopositiivisuuskeskusteluissa”.⁴⁹ It was published in *Kulttuurintutkimus* (a Finnish cultural studies journal) in 2019 (volume 36, issue 3–4).

Article II’s main focus was on how racialized women who have personal experience of fat embodiment verbalize (their) (in)visibility in body positive

⁴⁷ However, the instruction strategy also includes signs of resistance and meaning contestations involving the movement “insiders” as well (see next subsection).

⁴⁸ A recent study supports this by showing that empathy-based counterspeech can reduce hate speech in a social media setting, whereas a warning of consequences does not have that effect (Hangartner et al., 2021). Considering these discoveries, I would be delighted to see more academic work on this theme.

⁴⁹ Translation: “Hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility in Finnish intersectional online activism.”

content online.⁵⁰ In the context of this summary chapter, Article II demonstrates the kinds of meaning negotiations that take place *within* the body positivity movement, between so-called movement insiders. The data consisted of blog posts (n=48) and podcast episodes (n=5), and it was analyzed using dialogic thematic analysis.

A central concept in Article II was that of hyper(in)visibility (Gailey, 2014). For Jeannine A. Gailey (ibid., p. 7), “[f]at presents an apparent paradox because it is visible and dissected publicly; in this respect, it is hypervisible. Fat is also marginalized and erased; in this respect, it is hyperinvisible.” Further, Gailey elaborates that “[w]e are all visible and invisible at times ... but *one’s situation becomes ‘hyper’ when (in)visibility becomes socially oppressive*” (my emphasis; ibid., p. 8). The double term of hyper(in)visibility was therefore pertinent in analyzing the social positioning of fat women in general, and fat racialized women in particular.

The phenomenon of hyperinvisibility is relevant in understanding intra-movement meaning contestations because the current body positivity movement plays a role in rendering fat, racialized women hyperinvisible, which the activists in Article II resisted. Indeed, it is paradoxical that activism whose primary aim is, or should be, lifting up the most marginalized, fails to do that and instead further contributes to the hyperinvisibility of those embodiments. The activists’ resistance to such erasures was unequivocal and translated into meaning contestations precisely via their questioning of the power relations within the movement: “Body positivity has been appropriated to serve appropriately fat, White women. That is, appropriately fat. Appropriately White. Appropriately normal” (Marchant Aedo, 2018a; translation AP; see also Griffin et al., 2022).

The reverse side of hyperinvisibility is, of course, hypervisibility. The activists in Article II resisted this socially oppressive form of visibility by “owning” it, reclaiming it, and using it for their own purposes. One indication of the omnipresent and ameba-like nature of resistance(s) was that this claiming of hypervisibility was done not only in the context of the intra-movement meaning negotiations but also vis-à-vis the movement outsiders; in fact, the exact addressees of the hypervisibility-contesting actions remained unspecified.

It is quite telling of the state of society that the mere presence of a fat, non-White woman in a public space can be interpreted as a form of resistance. Again, drawing from the activists’ criticism, this kind of resistance was also aimed at such movement insiders who did not recognize their own privileged position but continued to perpetuate the hyperinvisibility of marginalized bodies.

I am happily transparent about the fact that I was not able to pinpoint the dynamics of the multiple intertwinings of gender, fat embodiment, and “race” in Article II. That is why I ended up proposing that researchers pay further attention to the interplay of these intersections, and particularly so in the Finnish context,

⁵⁰ Importantly, two of the activists in Article II do not explicitly identify themselves as women. In the article, I surmised that my interpretation of their gender identity was strongly affected by the fact that the majority of body positivity activists are (cis) women. After realizing that I may have unwittingly misgendered the activists, I have done my best to be more mindful of this topic going forward.

in which this discussion is more recent than in the United States, for example. I take the opportunity to reiterate that suggestion here.

4.3 Article III: The potential of ambivalence in body positivity activism?

The third original article was entitled “Can ambivalence hold potential for fat activism? An analysis of conflicting discourses on fatness in the Finnish column series *Jenny’s Life Change*.” It was published in *Fat Studies – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society* in 2019 (volume 8, issue 1). Article III primarily explored the question of how the presence of activists’ own anti-fat bias, or ambivalence, or yet internal resistance, can be conceptualized.

A 13-part column series called *Jenny’s Life Change* served as data for the article. The columns were written by Jenny Lehtinen, the figurehead of the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle’s body positivity campaign the Scale Rebellion. As methods of analysis, qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis were used.

In my analysis of the data, I distinguished four main discourses, which were the anti-“obesity,” fatphobic, size acceptance, and societal discourse. All of these were certainly noteworthy in their own right⁵¹, but the larger point here was their interplay and simultaneous circulation (Zembylas, 2012) in Finnish society. Article III did not include the category of “ambivalence” in the Findings section. Rather, the inner conflict came to the fore expressly through the fact that all the aforementioned discourses were present in a relatively small number of columns – sometimes even *within* one and the same column.

The reader’s attention might have been drawn to the names of the discourses and the apparent discrepancy between Lehtinen being a body positive activist yet entertaining notions such as anti-“obesity” and even fatphobia (or anti-fat bias) in her writing. In Article III (p. 67), it became clear that the activist held an anti-fat bias: “In my wildest (and pretty sick) fantasies, often still thumping in the back of my head, I would like to lose half of my body weight. And even if I say that I never ever want to lose weight again, that’s a lie as well. I do want to lose weight, every single day, many times.”

The columnist’s internal resistance – or the inner conflict between knowing the “correct” body positivity activist stance and realizing that one’s thoughts regularly contradict this stance – emerged probably most explicitly in this excerpt: “And above all, I should understand and accept this idea myself: my body is precious and beloved exactly as it is” (p. 68). Lehtinen was, however, cognizant that she was not entirely personally responsible for her ambivalence toward fatness: “If certain structures have built up in your mind for years and decades,

⁵¹ Furthermore, importantly, there is variation *within* discourses. For instance, as discussed earlier, the “size acceptance” discourse can be interpreted in various ways, such as through the “mainstream body positivity” lens (e.g., Darwin & Miller, 2021) or through a more critical, fat activism-inspired lens.

it takes time to change them. For some, it takes longer, for others, less. I'm one of the former" (ibid.).

In Article III, I made the argument that ambivalence should not be shunned in (body positivity) activism. Instead, it should be welcomed for the potential it may hold (Murray, 2005; 2008). Among other things, this potential may give rise to the observation described above: it may shed light on the fact that internal resistance is not a personal attribute (and, as such, a sign of a "failed" activist) but a consequence of the incompatible discourses circulating in society. I suggested that anti-fat bias and the ensuing ambivalence is "a normal and expected consequence of living in a culture that hates and fears fatness" (p. 71), and for that reason, there is no need to deny the experience of internal resistance.

4.4 Article IV: Resisting the thinness norm

The fourth original article was "Sofie's world: Resistance toward the thin ideal in Sofie Hagen's fat activist online content." It was published in 2021 in an anthology entitled *Appearance as Capital. The Normative Regulation of Aesthetic Capital Accumulation and Conversion*, edited by Outi Sarpila, Iida Kukkonen, Tero Pajunen, and Erica Åberg. Article IV addressed the ways in which Hagen challenges appearance-based norms via her online fat activism. In this summary chapter, Article IV's role concerns the investigation of potential convergences between the Finnish and non-Finnish body positivity/fat activist movements. These will be discussed at some length in subsection 5.4 "Convergences in resistance? A cross-cultural comparison." The article data consisted of Facebook posts (n~387).

Stemming from the shared vantage point of the anthology in which the text appeared, Article IV's theoretical framework was inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of different forms of capital, one of which is aesthetic or appearance-based capital. I argued that "a thin body equals aesthetic capital and thus potential for upward mobility or socioeconomic advantage, while a fat body equals the opposite - the reversal of existing opportunities" (p. 135). I traced how appearance-related norms and fat stigma (Goffman, 1963) are maintained and perpetuated through different societal institutions, and how fat activism attempts to break these norms. Out of all the original articles, Article IV outlined perhaps most clearly the background of societal anti-fatness.

With the aid of dialogic thematic analysis, four main themes were identified in the data in relation to how Hagen resists the thinness norm in her fat activist work. These were non-communication with the audience, offensive resistance, doing fatness wrong, and ambivalence. Non-communication was a category of analysis which arose entirely from the data, and it also cut across the other categories. This is an interesting finding, because one of the most distinctive features of so-called Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook is to "facilitate collective action and social interaction online with rich exchange of multimedia

information and evolution of aggregate knowledge” (Parameswaran & Whinston, 2007, p. 762).

Indeed, it was noteworthy that the activist deliberately did not engage in social interaction on a social media site. In my view, it can be interpreted from at least two perspectives: a more reactive one and a more proactive one. In the reactive interpretation, the activist’s non-communication comes across as a strategy to protect herself from hate speech that is expected to occur on the platform (e.g., Bolden, 2018). In the proactive explanation, the activist’s non-communication is conceptualized as an act of agency whereby the activist sets her own boundaries in the online space. Both of these may be true simultaneously, and more research is needed on the topic.

Offensive resistance (Cawley, 2015) has to do, first and foremost, with rhetorical strategies. In the context of Article IV, offensive resistance mainly meant language containing profanity, such as swearing and/or insults. As with the category of non-communication, here, too, I suggested that the use of offensive resistance may have a two-pronged motivation. First, it may occur as a result of the “marketplace of attention” logic, or put differently, of trying to solve the puzzle of “[h]ow [to] find an audience when there is an endless supply of content but a limited supply of public attention” (Webster, 2014). Graphic language may be an instrument through which to attract audience and build one’s brand. This is where the second potential motivation comes in: the use of offensive resistance may be a conscious choice, a proactive decision on how exactly Hagen wants her Facebook presence to come across.

Doing fatness wrong, as the name suggests, shifts the focus from words to concrete actions. Of particular note here was the observation that “[w]hile Sofie Hagen’s fat body does not constitute aesthetic capital in the society at large in this day and age – quite the contrary – it is important to note that it might in some smaller circles” (p. 142). I argued that in “Sofie’s world” – the fat activist microcosm she has created on a social media platform with tens of thousands of followers – it is *precisely her being fat* that affords her visibility and capital based on physical appearance. This, of course, is at odds with research showing that being at the intersection of female and fat, specifically, is a one-way ticket to a socially subjugating invisibility – in other words, hyperinvisibility (Gailey, 2014).⁵² I will discuss the theme of reverse appearance capital further in subsection 5.5 “Reverse appearance capital online.”

Finally, although Hagen’s content was generally characterized by a strong and positive fat identity, some cracks appeared in it as well. These were the expressions of ambivalence, which, while not many, were present regardless. Take this excerpt as an example: “I want to say something about this photo. My initial reaction was ‘I look big.’ And not in a cheerful-hurrah-YAY-I-LOOK-BIG way, but in a ‘Why didn’t I wear a belt; I look bigger than I am, I could have looked smaller if I had worn something else’ [way]” (p. 143). In another instance, Hagen acknowledged the ubiquity of anti-fatness and wrote: “Not that it’s easy

⁵² While Gailey’s (2014) research focus is on cis women, it is important to remember that Sofie Hagen identifies as nonbinary.

to change the way you think and feel. It's taken me 5-6 years. Lots of therapy and unlearning and educating myself" (ibid.). The convergences between the Finnish and the non-Finnish movements will be considered in more detail in subsection 5.4 "Convergences in resistance? A cross-cultural comparison."

5 RESULTS: MULTIPLE TYPES OF RESISTANCE

In the previous section, I presented summaries of the original articles. In this section, I take their main findings as my point of departure and further expand the analysis. Instead of proceeding article by article, however, I use the **types of resistance** as criteria for categorizing the research results as the different types are discussed in more than one article.

The types of resistance discussed in this dissertation are extra-movement resistance, intra-movement resistance, and intrapersonal resistance. In addition, I examine some convergences between the forms of resistance in Finnish and non-Finnish body positivity/fat activism(s). I also touch upon the phenomenon of “reverse appearance capital,” whereby fat embodiment, generally constituting an impediment, turns into an asset within a curated social media audience.

A central finding of this study is precisely those several varieties of resistance. Often, resistance in activism is associated with opposing the “powers that be,” and this type of resistance indeed was present in the data; I termed it extra-movement resistance. However, activist resistance is a much more manifold phenomenon. It was intriguing to notice that resistance also takes place within the movement – that is, meaning negotiations take place amongst activists as regards what body positivity is actually about. Lastly, internal resistance (i.e., within individual activists) occurs as well. On one hand, activists fully support the body positive cause. On the other hand, they sometimes cannot help but be affected by the cultural beauty ideals and therefore experience ambivalent feelings toward (their) fat embodiment.

5.1 Extra-movement resistance

5.1.1 Activist counterspeech as a “second shift”

In the context of body positivity activism in Finland, I use the term “first shift” to denote the activists’ original content production. The first shift is proactive:

activists engage in their work, addressing key questions in fat people's human rights. However, Article I presents several forms of activist resistance/counterspeech⁵³ in which the focus is specifically on the *responses* directed at those criticizing the movement. Because this type of activist work, in a way, "comes on top" of the original content production – or the first shift – I have deemed it appropriate to refer to it as a "second shift" for the activists.⁵⁴

Quite evidently, the boundaries between the two "shifts" are not clear-cut since the original activist content may already include elements responding to actual or assumed critics. On the other hand, the more "reactive" content includes components which can take the discussion in new directions and could therefore be interpreted as proactive in turn. I make these differentiations to understand the dynamics between the activists and the critics: I find it interesting that the amount of criticism directed at the movement is copious enough to necessitate a second shift from the activists.

In my estimation, this need to issue a lot of clarifications to the critics is actually a central trait of the early days of the body positivity movement in Finland.⁵⁵ In some cases, it might be true that the original activist content really is not clear enough and thus needs further elucidation. However, at other times, the critics seem to deliberately misunderstand and even provoke the activists. As pointed out by astute participants of the 2018 Gender Studies Conference in Turku, Finland (pers. comm., November 24, 2018), it is not always straightforward to tell which is the case in a given situation.

In any case, this constant provision of instructions may lead to activist burnout (e.g., Chastain, 2017). If activists continue to rectify misunderstandings so that the core tenets of their cause would be properly understood – even if the other party is not interested in dialogue and may in fact simply be trolling – the activists may experience exhaustion and possibly turn their back on activist work. Without doubt, the use of the confrontation strategy is also stressful (partly for different reasons?), but the instruction strategy may still be more "labor intensive" because with confrontation, activists can simply tell the critics they are wrong, but they do not necessarily need to explain why. In her aptly named blog post "How I Lost My Appetite for Writing About Fat Politics," fat activist and blogger Lesley Kinzel (2016) describes this kind of fatigue, built up over the years:

And I won't promise I'm done talking about this [fat politics]. I'll probably never stop. Still, the fire I once had for it is duller now. I feel guilty as hell

⁵³ Particularly in this section, I use "resistance" and "counterspeech" interchangeably to avoid monotony. Kirsi Juhila's (2004, p. 20) definition of counterspeech is fitting here: it is always the "next move," in other words, a reaction to something that was said previously. The word "counter" reveals that the response expresses disagreement in one way or another (ibid.).

⁵⁴ This is, of course, a nod to the book carrying the same name (Russell, 1989), which points to the unequal division of labor, i.e., upon coming home after a day in a salaried job, women take up a second shift of child-rearing and domestic chores.

⁵⁵ Nevertheless, according to my understanding, this need to explain has not disappeared after my data collection period came to an end in 2020. Therefore, the time period is probably not the only explaining factor.

admitting that. But I'm worn out from beating the same drum to a parade that's only half hearing it.

One reason why the public at large might be "only half hearing" the fat activist message is the common stereotype that being fat is the individual's "own fault," further compounded by the neoliberal ethos of personal responsibility (Harjunen, 2017). Therefore, if getting fat in the first place is a choice, then deciding not to become not-fat is also a choice. If a person declines thinness – while, for example, knowing fully well how pernicious fatness is to one's health, the reasoning goes – then fat activism's reason for being must be to fabricate excuses for continuing the fat existence and letting oneself "off the hook" (Kay, 2013; Young, 2013).

This perceived intentionality of "stubbornly" staying fat and endorsing fatness without shame seems to be at the heart of the Finnish critics' communication directed at the activists. Among the most common criticisms raised against the body positivity movement are that it (i) glorifies fatness, (ii) encourages fat people to stay fat, and (iii) opposes weight loss and discriminates against people who are not fat (Article I, p. 23). As I write in Article I, the shared basic message of the criticisms is that body positive ideas are welcomed per se, but if and when they "go too far," caution is necessary (ibid.). In other words, while no one should be discriminated against based on body size or weight, no one should actually be fat in the first place because it is not healthy.

Gender has a central role to play, too. Sociologist Eeva Luhtakallio (2010), who has studied civic activism in Finland and France, has noted that it has not been customary in Finland to see young women as credible activist actors. In the 1990s, when activism against fur farming reached a pinnacle in Finland, some of the central figures of the animal rights movement – young women – were pejoratively called *kettutyöt* ("fox girls") to suggest their unfounded idealism and detachment from the "real world." This happened despite the fact that many of them had been long-term advocates for non-human animal justice, and Luhtakallio traces this belittling back to the gender of the activists (ibid.).

Although this example is from three decades ago, a similar phenomenon can be witnessed in the criticism directed at body positivity activism in 2010s Finland. A case in point is a blog post from a time when online debates around the topic were perhaps at their most intense (Kokko, 2018). The post is by Timo Kettunen, who introduces himself as a Master of Health Science, pharmacist, and a massage therapist (Kettunen, 2018). His post is partly a response to Mari Kähkönen, a woman who wrote an opinion column stating that despite being fat, she is perfectly healthy but is still viewed as someone who "somehow mysteriously causes higher healthcare costs, which will be the ruin of the entire welfare state" (Kähkönen, 2018; translation AP). The blogger starts his reply with "Well, listen up, Mari, the ways in which you raise healthcare costs are in no way mysterious" (Kettunen, 2018; translation AP). Research has shown that calling women by their first names is used to belittle and downplay their position and arguments (e.g., Karhunpesä, 2012, p. 10). Kähkönen is not expressly an activist, but considering Luhtakallio's findings, I think it is justified to state that the

resistance the body positivity movement has faced is – at least in part – because many of its proponents identify as not men.

One of the activists whose content I analyze in Article I is Tytti Shemeikka, whose YouTube channel is called *Vatsamielenosoitus*.⁵⁶ As I describe in Table 2, the channel's content is characterized by strong emotions, offensive resistance (to borrow terminology from Article IV), and confrontation. Shemeikka's (2018, pp. 3–4) master's thesis corroborates my findings on the criticisms against the movement, as described above in this subsection. In her thesis, she uses her own fat activist content as data and describes the central findings thus:

[In] the comments of a body positive YouTube channel obesity was talked through a medicalization discourse and obesity was seen as a temporary state. Losing weight was offered as a solution to the negative comments about obesity. The purpose of the hate speech in the comments was to silence the maker of the video [Shemeikka herself] by insulting her looks, femininity and sexual orientation. The maker of the video was attempted to be silenced with suicide suggestions. (Shemeikka, 2018, n.p.)

The lengthy quote serves two purposes here. On one hand, it illustrates the negative comments body positivity activists receive on social media, including telling them to commit suicide. Unfortunately, this is not uncommon (e.g., Young, 2018). On the other hand, it is pertinent to the present study to note that although Shemeikka did not initiate content creation solely for her master's thesis project, she did know she would be studying the comments, and this might have had an effect on the content she subsequently produced. However, even if her colorful self-expression in the videos might have been partly motivated by her desire to receive as expansive an array of comments as possible (to then be analyzed in the thesis), I absolutely do not consider hate speech acceptable, let alone “deserved,” on social media (see, e.g., Saresma et al., 2022).

5.1.2 Humor in activism as resistance

As demonstrated, Article I contains several instances of counterspeech (as do other articles, but the phenomenon is perhaps most pronounced in Article I). What counterspeech looks like in practice is that activists respond directly to those who produce and favor medicalized and other discourses in which fatness is presented as a one-sidedly negative phenomenon. However, I also wish to turn the reader's attention to the more subtle resistances present in the activist content, which I call oblique (in contrast to direct resistance).⁵⁷

Humor is a strategy of oblique resistance which I have not discussed in the articles. This is because my understanding of the role of humor as a form of

⁵⁶ The channel's name is a pun, fashioned to mimic another word, *vastamielenosoitus*, which sounds almost the same and means “counterprotest.” *Vatsamielenosoitus*, in turn, roughly signifies “belly protest.”

⁵⁷ Another form of oblique resistance observed in this study is silence, or non-communication. I will address it further in subsection 5.4.

oblique resistance only started to emerge after I had become familiar with all the data and written the articles. Therefore, I will season the reflections that follow with some theoretical remarks.

In the context of environmental activism, researcher Jari Lyytimäki (2018) has pointed out that humor can serve two important purposes: it points to where things are going wrong and enables the questioning of commonly held “truths.” Majken Jul Sørensen (2016), who has carried out research specifically on humor in activism, has remarked that humor is a way not only to make the activists’ cause more palatable to outsiders but also to lessen the emotional burden of activism, which involves thinking about injustices on a daily basis. In other words, humor in activism may be equally important to activists themselves. As a general observation, the humor in the Finnish activists’ content often has a sharp edge, containing more than a pinch of sarcasm or irony.⁵⁸

Let us first consider Lyytimäki’s (2018) observations. Indeed, an important aspect of the body positivity activists’ work seems to be to first make commonly held truths, or stereotypes, visible (i.e., “where things are going wrong”) and then challenge them (“the questioning of commonly held truths”). In a video on the *Vatsamielenosoitus* (2018a) channel, Shemeikka challenges the stereotype that fat people are gluttonous and do nothing but eat all day:

One taboo in our society is that fat people eat nothing but junk. Well, actually, it’s not a taboo, it’s more like a common-sense truth that everybody “just knows.” ... In the past, I’ve been ashamed of eating in public. But no more! I’m no longer ashamed of being fat. And you know what we’re going to be eating today? Hamburgers! (Translation AP.)

There are no explicit jokes in the content here. Rather, the humor is based on something surprising (Hietalahti, 2018), something that does not quite fit: the activist shows herself eating and enjoying a hamburger – something that a fat person is not supposed, or expected, to do in public.⁵⁹ In addition to the words used, the humor is created through visual expression (Rossi, 2007), particularly so through the exaggerated imagery of a fat person’s over-indulgence. There are over-the-top close-ups and zoom-ins, slow motion is used, and overbearing music is playing in the background.

I now turn to Sørensen’s (2016) notion that humor in activism is not only used to make the activists’ message more accessible to the audience; it also exists for the activists themselves. This seems to be true in the Finnish context, too. In an excerpt from another video on *Vatsamielenosoitus* (2018b), Shemeikka and her guest Jenny Lehtinen (whose columns served as data for Article III) talk about the hate comments they have received because they engage in body positivity activism:

⁵⁸ For the purposes of cross-cultural/-linguistic comparison, see Melonie R. McMichael’s (2010, pp. 183–186) doctoral dissertation on humor as resistance in anglophone fat activism.

⁵⁹ This is clearly connected to “doing fatness wrong,” which I discuss in Article IV.

Jenny Lehtinen: "If you ever want to Google yourself, timing is everything. You don't want to do it during the darkest hours --"

Tytti Shemeikka: "Yeah, at home, by yourself --"

*Jenny Lehtinen: "Exactly, when you're feeling this deepest-of-the-deep emptiness inside and just craving for some positive reinforcement, that's when you do *not* Google yourself." (Translation AP)*

In this humorous, and of course ironic, exchange, the activists share what it feels like to be in the receiving end of hate comments and even death wishes. In my view, here the humor clearly exists for the activists themselves. By using humor to build upon each other's stories in imagining the least favorable circumstances in which to perform an Internet search on themselves, anticipating negative comments, the activists show to each other that they know how difficult it may sometimes feel to engage in activism.

Differently put, the activists use rough humor to build connectedness and community. It works in this way because it is shared and mutually understood. Humor, even if satirical or ironic (Hietalahti, 2012), provides a moment's relief from the pressures of being an activist, especially in a field as contested as body positivity.

5.2 Intra-movement resistance

5.2.1 Preface: The Scale Rebellion's role in the movement

Published in early 2019, I wrote Article III in 2018, not long after the Scale Rebellion campaign had drawn to a close at the end of 2017. As noted in the article summary in subsection 4.3 above, my focus was primarily on the theme of ambivalence, and in light of the many contradicting discourses discernible in Jenny Lehtinen's columns, I do think this approach was justifiable.⁶⁰ However, I think it is pertinent to discuss the role of the Scale Rebellion campaign for the Finnish body positivity movement more generally now, some six years after its execution.

I claim that since the Scale Rebellion was among the very first media "interventions" in Finland that were expressly labeled as body positive, it was the campaign – and therefore, ultimately, Yle – that mainstreamed the concept of body positivity in Finland. To this day, I have not come across another country where public funding and this type of year-long multi-media visibility have been used as extensively to promote the body positive cause. Indeed, a considerable amount of resources were spent on the campaign in which journalist Jenny Lehtinen quit dieting and pointed out the many shortcomings of the healthcare system and the media, among others, in how they address fatness. In the

⁶⁰ I attempt a more nuanced discussion on ambivalence, or intrapersonal resistance, in subsection 5.3 "Intrapersonal resistance."

previous year, Lehtinen had already founded a Facebook group called *Jenny and the FatMythBusters*, in which similar topics were discussed. The group's membership was (and continues to be, although under a different name) in tens of thousands.

Largely based on this publicity, and indicative of the clout of Yle's content, the Institute for the Languages of Finland (2017) listed "body positivity" as one of its word picks for 2017. A further indication of Yle's influence is that Lehtinen, the campaign leader, later arranged for a meeting with the Finnish Minister of Social Affairs and Health, Annika Saarikko, who publicly committed to increasing training for healthcare professionals to improve their competence and sensitivity in encountering fat underaged patients (Yle, 2018).

However, in the process of mainstreaming body positivity, Yle included some aspects on which not all body positivity activists agree (see next subsection). For example, the Scale Rebellion is called a "weight control revolution" on the campaign's landing page (Yle, n.d.). At the same time, some of the country's most prominent body positivity activists have been explicit in that body positivity and weight loss attempts are not compatible (e.g., Shemeikka, 2020; 2021).

One possible explanation behind this more tentative approach (cf. Cooper, 2008, n.p.) to body positivity may be Yle's ultimate position in serving the public good (Finlex, 1993) and the likely interpretation – in light of how fatness is generally viewed in society – that the public good is best served by encouraging citizens to lose weight. Lehtinen attracted great attention in 2016 through the aforementioned Facebook group as well as by co-hosting a talk show, *Marja Hintikka Live*, and I presume Yle wanted to make use of this success by launching the Scale Rebellion the next year. In the end, I posit that through Yle's involvement, Finns became familiar with the *concept* of body positivity but less so with its contents, and they were even confused as to what the campaign actually wanted to achieve (e.g., Juti, 2017).

5.2.2 Insider counterspeech

Social media participations are often referred to as flexible, spontaneous, horizontal and grassroots; however, ... they are permeated by various hierarchies. Instead of romanticizing the communities of participation, it is more useful to explore their inherent hierarchies and, from there, think about the possibilities of building common differences (acknowledging rather than disputing difference). (Nikunen, 2019, p. 148)

In subsection 5.1, the focus was on counterspeech directed at those who hold negative opinions vis-à-vis the movement, be they particular individuals or society at large. Along with extra-movement resistance, another type of counterspeech can also be found in the data, namely that directed at "insiders" of the movement or, as activist Nerdingplussize puts it in Article I, at "those who would like to be vocal about body positivity" (p. 28; translation AP).⁶¹

⁶¹ It is noteworthy that I consider this, too, to be counterspeech although its recipients are (supposed to be) familiar with and sympathetic to the movement. I justify this with Juhila's

It is, in fact, a fascinating observation that activist counterspeech is not only directed at the critics of the movement – which is, I would say, not only to be expected but the very bread and butter of activism overall – but also at its sympathizers and even activist colleagues. In an intriguing fashion, this phenomenon raises the question of who actually *is* a “real” activist or a movement insider, and who gets to define the non-negotiable principles of body positivity activism in the country.⁶² Similarly to what Kaarina Nikunen (2019, p. 131) has written in the context of craftivism, Finnish body positivity activism, too, “appears to be formed through loose networks, as horizontal and leaderless; however, this does not mean that it is without hierarchies.”⁶³

In the study data, three main strands of counterspeech directed at the movement’s sympathizers or insiders can be discerned. The first is the overall claim, put forward by a blogger from the Body Posi Suomi NGO quoted in Article I, that body positivity and body peace belong to literally everybody, and how this is “sometimes forgotten even in body positive [online] discussion groups” (translation AP). The writer goes on to say that it is just as bad to criticize a thin body as it is to criticize a fat one and lists additional bodily features in relation to which everyone should refrain from expressing negative feedback to others: muscularity (especially women’s) and people’s shortness or tallness. The activist therefore draws their colleagues’ attention to withholding criticism based on physique, no matter what the specific attribute is.

The second type of counterspeech directed at movement insiders is more all-encompassing in that it builds specifically on an understanding of intersectionality. According to these views, body positivity activism can – and should – be used as a tool for change to combat not only anti-fatness but other social injustices such as racism and ableism as well (Nerdinplussize, Article I, p.

(2004, p. 20) observation that a crucial element of counterspeech is the expression of disagreement.

⁶² Maya Maor (2013a) discusses this phenomenon through the concept of boundary work, which is about “determining who belongs and who is excluded” (p. 281).

⁶³ The other side of the intra-movement resistance “coin” is the cooperation and support between the activists. Since this dissertation’s focus is on resistance(s), the ensuing, unintended implication might therefore be that solidarity is absent in the Finnish body positivity movement; however, this is not the case. For instance, activists have come together on several occasions to create content. Javiera Marchant Aedo has been a guest in two of Caroline Suinner and Meriam Trabelsi’s podcast episodes (Ruskeat Tytöt, 2021; see Article II), and Tytti Shemeikka invited the Scale Rebellion’s Jenny Lehtinen to appear as her guest on the *Vatsamielenosoitus* YouTube channel, as referenced in subsection 5.1.2. These cooperations simultaneously bridge the (far from clear-cut) online/offline divide in activism (e.g., Nikunen, 2019; Taylor, 2016): after all, before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, physical proximity was possible and common. Activists also reference each others’ work. For example, Marchant Aedo (2018b) has referred to Suinner and Trabelsi’s *Pehmeä* Instagram account in her blog. In addition, there has been intra-movement cooperation in branching out to so-called traditional media (cf. footnote 32), such as when a group of three activists (Shemeikka et al., 2018) wrote an opinion piece for the largest newspaper of the country. The piece, entitled “Shaming fat people only leads to self-hatred – instead of reciting health risks, attention should be put on how fatness is talked about” (translation AP), was a response to Pippa Laukka, a doctor who had previously compared body positivity to prohibition because of its “absolutism” in the same newspaper (Laukka, 2018). In this way, intra-movement cooperation can be seen to contribute to extra-movement resistance efforts as well.

28). A related reminder to fellow activists, also from Nerdinplussize, is to remain cognizant of body positivity's systemic nature, that is, to remember that the movement's *raison d'être* goes significantly beyond whether an individual feels good about themselves at a given moment (ibid.). I interpret this assertion to underline the crucial difference between the fat activism-inspired version of body positivity advocated by the activist and the more capitalistic/postfeminist versions of body positivity that stress individual agency and aim for an increased sale of services and/or products (e.g., Omaheimo & Särmä, 2017; see also subsection 2.1 "Body positivity activism and fat activism").

In Article II, the counterspeech aimed at movement insiders goes a step further. Here the message is that instead of being part of the solution – that is, centering the discussion around the most marginalized embodiments such as fat Black women – the body positivity movement actually works in the other direction: contributing to the *further marginalization* of those very bodies it is supposed to lift up (see also, e.g., Darwin & Miller, 2021, p. 885).⁶⁴ Not only is there complete silence around the intersection of racialization and fatness in Finland, as pointed out by activist Meriam Trabelsi in Article II, but an outright appropriation of the movement has also occurred: "Body positivity has been appropriated to serve appropriately fat, White women" (Marchant Aedo in Article II, p. 8). To remedy the situation, the activists insist that those in a privileged position give space to those in the margins and give access to other marginalized embodiments.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ These dynamics, which are here presented as a feature of body positivity activism specifically, in fact reflect larger tendencies in the so-called new social movements (NSMs). NSMs are "connected to longer histories of social movements that have been developing from the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the failure of traditional politics to take seriously, for example, women's rights, racism, and the rights of sexual minorities. ... By organizing across and beyond traditional alliances (such as right and left), they can address and identify issues that go across old party lines (feminist and environmental issues being typical)" (Nikunen, 2019, p. 132). On one hand, these issue-based NSMs, particularly when facilitated through digital media, may be flexible and many-voiced, even intimate (ibid., p. 131). On the other hand, NSMs may also be exclusive and thereby "reinforce rather than challenge existing power relations" (ibid.). What is more, with the introduction of social media, participation in NSMs may be less committed as individuality is emphasized at the expense of solidarity, and people's participation may end up benefiting the social media corporations (ibid., pp. 133–135). These tensions and contradictions are present in the study at hand as well.

⁶⁵ A discussion that is related and relevant, yet in the context of this dissertation peripheral enough to be placed in a footnote, is the issue of counterpublics (Squires, 2002; see also Fraser, 1990, for subaltern counterpublics). Catherine R. Squires (2002) offers a lexicon to better describe the different kinds of responses that Black communities, or (counter)publics, have employed in the United States in the face of oppression from the state, for example. I argue that it is also meaningful to talk about counterpublics in the context of body positivity activism in Finland. Squires' central argument is that there never was a single Black public sphere that resisted and opposed the dominant – in this case, White – sphere. The context of Squires' article is, of course, different from contemporary Finnish body positivity activism, but I have found it useful to apply the notion of multiple fat counterpublics in the Finnish case as well. Squires' conceptualization helps drive home the point that there really is too much diversity within the Finnish body positivity movement to speak about it in singular form. In other words, instead of trying to analyze "the" body positivity activism happening in Finland, it is more helpful to look at it as activismS, or multiple fat counterpublics. It would be essential for future research to look into the intersections, privileges, and resources that justify speaking about activismS, or

Using fifty blog posts dated between 2014 and 2016 as data, Helana Darwin and Amara Miller (2021) have identified four social movement frames within the body positivity movement in the North American context: mainstream body positivity, fat positivity = body positivity, radical body positivity, and body neutrality. These frames concern the bloggers' discussions on and representations of the movement's purpose (*ibid.*, p. 884). According to the researchers, key differences between the four frames, or "factions," "often arise due to intersecting experiences of privilege and oppression within the movement, as well as disagreements between activists about whether the movement should focus on individualized, psychological issues such as body image or structural concerns such as size discrimination" (*ibid.*, p. 873).

To a large extent, Darwin and Miller's (*ibid.*) findings resonate with those presented in this study. First, mainstream body positivity corresponds to the commercial, postfeminist variants of body positivity that are excluded from the present work altogether (see subsection 2.1). Second, fat positivity = body positivity refers to a frame in which attention is only paid to fat embodiment as a basis for marginalization. In other words, while the proponents of this faction generally acknowledge the structural nature of anti-fat bias (in contrast to mainstream body positivity's individual focus), they might amplify "the concerns of the relatively privileged – in this case, (fat) middle-class white women" (*ibid.*, p. 882). This is akin to what I suggested earlier in the dissertation (in subsection 3.2.1 "Description of the data"), writing that "intersectionality is an important aspect in some activists' work, whereas others rarely discuss it."

Darwin and Miller's third frame or faction, radical body positivity, in turn does not agree that the movement's focus should be solely on issues related to fatness. Instead, in addition to actively resisting the mainstream body positivity frame, it claims that body positivity should encompass "all axes of oppression" (*ibid.*, p. 882) and therefore also renounce the fat positivity = body positivity faction. I would argue that all the three types of insider counterspeech analyzed in this subsection fall under the radical body positivity frame. It is true that their scope varies considerably, and the first type ("body positivity is for literally everybody") is not explicitly intersectional in that it concentrates on body shape and size alone. At the same time, it does not only emphasize fatness but rather the great diversity of human bodies more generally.

Finally, the fourth frame, body neutrality, "focuses on individual psychological transformation, but contests the Mainstream frame's focus on self-love, advocating instead for an adjusted goal" (*ibid.*, p. 884), that is, body neutrality. This faction's reasoning is that expecting people, especially those in the margins, to love their bodies is not realistic in an environment in which the messages they receive are anything but loving, and therefore aiming for neutrality is more doable. This is an interesting addition to the intra-movement frames and one that I have not explicitly analyzed in my data (indeed, Darwin and Miller [*ibid.*, p. 877] call for further research in order to "determine whether

counterpublics, in plural in the Finnish body positivity activism context. In the present work, I talk about resistance(s) – activismS might be the logical next step.

these factions represent separate movements altogether, rather than facets of the same movement”). As a general remark, however, I would say that the body neutrality frame is recognizable in the Finnish activists’ parlance, too. In one of the earlier influential Finnish-language writings on body positivity and fat activism, Raisa Omaheimo and Saara Särämä (2017) echo this sentiment: there is no need to love your body, one should instead aim at not actively hating it. Body positivity activists such as Marchant Aedo (2018c) and Shemeikka (Vatsamielenosoitus, 2020) have concurred with this and shared the idea onward to their audiences.

5.3 Intrapersonal resistance

All activism is resistance, but not all resistance is activism. (Stewart & Breeden, 2021, p. 224)

In this subsection, I want to look further at some aspects which question the first part of Terah J. Stewart and Roshaunda L. Breeden’s argument above (already familiar from subsection 2.4). My interest lies in two themes in particular. The first concerns my (and Michalinos Zembylas’ [2012]) conceptualization of ambivalence in Article III as a societal and discursive matter – that is, as something that springs from the many contradicting ways fatness is talked about in society. On the other hand, Marissa Dickins and others (2011) have suggested an alternative explanation for fat activists’ felt ambivalence, which I want to explore here. Second, I am looking forward to discussing in more depth the central argument of Article III, namely that ambivalence holds potential and can indeed be a strength for activism.

5.3.1 Ambivalence as activists’ “early career phase”?

In their 2011 article “The Role of the Fatosphere in Fat Adults’ Responses to Obesity Stigma: A Model of Empowerment Without a Focus on Weight Loss,” Dickins and colleagues propose a model that depicts three stages of fat acceptance as a way of resisting stigmatizing “obesity” discourses (my quotation marks; p. 1686). The researchers interviewed 44 bloggers, all active in the fatosphere, and discovered that many of the interviewees seemed to proceed through similar stages in their fat activist journey.⁶⁶ While Stage 1 is characterized by self- and body hatred, and Stage 3, in turn, encompasses fat acceptance, it is in Stage 2 that ambivalence is present (ibid.).

The authors describe Stage 2 as the “crisis point,” marked by a search for alternatives as well as a negotiation of the dominant “obesity” discourses (my quotation marks; ibid., p. 1684). The central outcomes of Stage 2 include

⁶⁶ The writers do not call the bloggers “activists,” but I think this juxtaposition is justified because both the bloggers from 2011 and the activists from 2015–2020 share the common goal of advancing fat people’s human rights.

uncertainty and fear of letting go of the thin ideal (ibid., p. 1686). These, of course, are close to synonymous with ambivalence. In other words, in the article by Dickins and others, the activist's ambivalence is positioned as an intermediary, and as such temporary, step between hating one's fat body and accepting it.

In the light of Dickins and colleagues' work, I now ask: might the ambivalence described in Article III actually be indicative of the activist's – in this particular case, Jenny Lehtinen's – "early career phase" as a body positivity activist, an in-between stage in which body hatred has mostly been left behind, and in which fat acceptance is already looming on the horizon? On the basis of the data alone, I cannot entirely refute this possibility. Indeed, perhaps the columns *were* written at a time when Lehtinen was transitioning from what Dickins and others call Stage 1 to Stage 3 via the "crisis point," or Stage 2, and this manifested itself as ambivalence in the texts.

At the same time, ambivalence regarding fatness is so widespread among fat activists that it does not seem plausible to consider it as a passing phase only. Quite the contrary: as Cooper (1998, pp. 57–58) has written, despite all their work against fat bias, fat activists sometimes "still end up back at square one, blaming [their] bodies for [their] oppression and feeling overwhelmed by [their] fatness."⁶⁷ Indeed, it was precisely the prevalence of ambivalence among activists that led me to propose that instead of trying to eliminate ambivalence from activism, it might be worth embracing.

5.3.2 Potential of ambivalence

Upon embarking on the theme of this subsection, Maya Maor's (2012) work on the ambivalent nature of resistance is pertinent. She posits that "[a]lternative communities, as a collective, often display deep intolerance toward ... ambivalence" (ibid., p. 193; see also Cooper, 1998). Further, according to Maor (2012, p. 193), said intolerance stems from what she calls the "fantasy of pure resistance."

Referencing Samantha Murray (2005), Maor clarifies this term, explaining that "[w]hen a subject is embedded within an oppressive social context, a consciousness of pure resistance or pure self-acceptance is neither possible nor necessary" (Maor, 2012, p. 193), further arguing that "[s]ubjectivity is multivocal, plural, contradictory, and constantly changing, for those who practice fat acceptance, as much as for everyone else" (ibid.). Regarding this ambivalent nature of resistance, Maor posits that it

is not a deformity or a deficiency, but rather emblematic of the inner dynamics by which resistance manifests itself over time. Accordingly, acts of subversion and resistance need not be considered antagonistic or mutually exclusive with acts of social conformity. The interplay between

⁶⁷ To use Article IV as an example, Sofie Hagen expresses ambivalence in 2016 as well as in 2020.

elements of conformity and resistance is continuously taking place. (ibid., p. 193)

Activist Javiera Marchant Aedo (2020) has proposed that “body positivity is not an identity or an adjective. What body positivity is is engaging in action to improve fat people’s rights” (translation AP). I argue that taking this approach to body positivity or, put differently, separating one’s activist work from one’s personal identity may make the ambivalence easier to bear. When activism is seen through the prism of deliberate action rather than identity, ambivalence regarding fatness may translate less readily to the activist feeling like a “sell-out,” failure, or someone whose commitment to the cause is compromised. With the focus on activist action specifically, the activist commitment becomes visible through content creation and other potential avenues such as live events. What is more, the focus on actions may redirect the spotlight from the activist as an individual to their role in contributing to the movement as a whole. In addition, following Maor (2012), it is helpful to remember that often, resistance and conformity coexist, instead of canceling each other out, so to speak.

As said, it is understandable that ambivalence might not always be openly expressed lest it be associated with being a “failed” activist. However, and perhaps paradoxically, ambivalence can work in activism’s favor through at least two routes.⁶⁸ First, communicating contradictions openly might indicate that activists do not consider themselves to be “above” the norms related to physical appearance and body size but experience the same uncertainties as most others do in society. This, in turn, could make body positivity activism more easily approachable and, in consequence, make the movement stronger. Second, through the recognition of ambivalence (including strongly negative feelings such as disgust; Vartanian, 2010) that many feel toward fatness, it is possible to plan further communication strategies directed at critics of the movement as well as the general public, thus rendering the work more persuasive.

Finally, as also noted in Article I, ambivalence may often be accompanied and followed by introspection and reflection. Such reflection may give rise to new insights, which in turn may invigorate the movement through collaborations or new initiatives, among others. Activism may deepen, strengthen, and/or diversify. Amidst constant changes in the world, online and off, activism that is not sta(b)le may make the movement more viable and ensure its continuity in the long haul.

5.4 Convergences in resistance? A cross-cultural comparison

I will now examine the convergences between the resistance(s) in the body positivity movement in Finland and the work of Sofie Hagen, which she calls fat activism. I am interested in whether the forms of resistance found in Hagen’s

⁶⁸ I have discussed both in passing in Article I.

content are also present in activist work in Finland.⁶⁹ The most visible similarity was the category of extra-movement resistance. Intrapersonal resistance, or ambivalence, was also an element present in both Finnish and non-Finnish activist content. Intra-movement resistance was noteworthy in that it was quite clearly perceivable in the data collected from Finland, but significantly less so in Article IV.⁷⁰

Out of the four elements in Hagen's "palette," three fall under the category of extra-movement resistance: offensive resistance, doing fatness wrong/flaunting fatness, and non-communication (reluctance to engage in dialogue with one's audience on social media).⁷¹ In Article IV, I established swearing and/or insults as the defining feature of offensive resistance. On these grounds, offensive resistance was present in the data used in Article I and Article II. However, profanity was absent in the data used in Article III. I attribute this to the nature of the activist's platform: the columns were published on the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle's website. As Yle is 99.98% owned by the Finnish state and thereby funded by taxes, standards are in place as to employees' "responsible" language use (Yle, 2017b).

The category of doing fatness wrong and/or flaunting fatness was also visible in both Article I and Article II. These two data sets included instances of eating and dressing, among others, that are good examples of contesting the so-called good fatty stereotype (e.g., Bias, 2014). Again, Article III seemed to be a bit of an outlier. Toward the end of the article (p. 69), there is a quote that suggests flaunting: "You are a human being with the right to define your body exactly the way you want to. You are allowed to be healthy, beautiful, athletic, hard working, sexy, whatever you want." But I would venture that the overall ambivalent tone of the data set and thus the article attenuates whatever elements of flaunting that might be present.

Next, we come to non-communication. I mentioned above that when writing this dissertation, I discerned two types of oblique resistance in the research data. One of them was humor (discussed in subsection 5.1.2), and the other was silence – again, I used the term "non-communication with the audience" in Article IV. Because I wrote Article IV last, I was not on the lookout for signs of silence during my analysis of the Finnish-language data. That is why I argue only preliminarily that non-communication or silence is likely exercised in Finnish activist contents as well – for instance, by ignoring slurs made based on body size in the YouTube comment section.⁷² In addition, it would probably be necessary

⁶⁹ The focus of the dissertation is expressly on the movement in Finland. Therefore, the elements discovered in Article IV will be compared to those in the other articles. In contrast, I will not explicitly explore whether the "Finnish resistance(s)" discussed in Articles I-III can be found in Sofie Hagen's work (Article IV).

⁷⁰ I mention in Article IV (p. 143) that "Sofie Hagen's reservations about the body positivity movement would certainly warrant further analysis," which implies that intra-movement resistance is present in that data set, too. However, since I do not discuss it further in the article, I have decided not to include the theme in this subsection.

⁷¹ I will not describe the categories in detail here because that information can be found in Section 4 "Article summaries."

⁷² On the other hand, not all platforms and/or content formats allow for comments, such as podcasts (Article II) and columns (Article III).

to differentiate between silence toward hostile audiences and silence toward empathetic audiences. In any event, activists' silence deserves more attention from the academic community, although understandably, it is easier to observe something that is present than something that is not.

The expressions of intrapersonal resistance, or ambivalence, were actually more pronounced in the Finnish data than in the non-Finnish one in Article IV. As has become clear by now, ambivalence was clearly noticeable in Article III. Intrapersonal resistance was also alluded to in Article I, albeit under a related concept, introspection. One point worthy of mention here is that Article II makes no mention of ambivalence. One reason could be the overall framework of hyper(in)visibility, which may partly divert attention from the intrapersonal experience.⁷³

5.5 Reverse appearance capital online

In the context of Sofie Hagen's fat activism, the expressions of a fat body's lived experiences "become the 'currency' through which one can express independent critical thinking, heightened awareness of social justice issues and empowerment" (Article IV, p. 142; cf. Åberg, 2019). More specifically, I interpret that the activist sends the following implicit message to their audience: "I am well aware that this body is heavily stigmatized, and that my life would be significantly easier were I to change it (or at least attempt it); yet, since I am not buying into society's distorted beauty standards, I will fiercely remain in this body and fight against the inevitable ramifications, as well as share the journey with you." It is this resistance in the face of glaring injustice based on looks that affords Hagen the admiration and support of her followers, whence the claim that paradoxically, it is expressly fatness that allows her to transform appearance capital into social capital (and possibly economic capital, too; Åberg & Salonen, 2021). Subsequently, it also earns her more attention from the audience as well as an upward move on the overall capital scale.

Article IV was my last PhD-related publication, and this theme of "reverse appearance capital," as I think is apt to call it, did not surface earlier in my analysis of the Finnish body positivity content. However, it seems that this phenomenon of possessing unexpected (in terms of the prevailing appearance norms) aesthetic or appearance capital resonates with the data collected in the Finnish setting as well. As one indication of this, I mention the frequent comments praising activists for their bravery (it was perhaps for this reason that the phenomenon of reverse appearance capital did not surface in the analysis: the comment sections were not part of the research).

In fact, I have addressed this issue directly in Article IV (p. 145): "the bravery discourse ... ends up unintentionally reinforcing the very norms it is

⁷³ In Article II (p. 11), "gauging visibility" is perhaps the closest I come to the idea of ambivalence. The term is from Bonita C. Long and colleagues (2008).

intended to challenge. After all, there is nothing brave about looking like the societally preferred norm, whereas the ‘So brave!’ exclamations serve to underline those instances in which the commented-upon bodies are in some way lacking.” Yet, although problematic, it is justified to interpret the bravery discourse as an indication of social capital afforded to the activist by the audience on the basis of the activist’s looks.⁷⁴

Another question to address is how the situatedness at different intersections affects the support given by the audience, or its withdrawal. To once more use Hagen as an example, it is noteworthy that “as someone who is white, young and able-bodied, being fat is one of the few ways in which Sofie Hagen does *not* conform [to the prevailing norms]” (my emphasis; *ibid.*). From this it follows that more research is needed not only on the phenomenon of reverse appearance capital in general but also on its more specific constituents, such as who is likely or less likely to have this capital conferred on them.

Indeed, a concern that may arise has to do with what “kinds of fat activism ... are actually welcomed or acknowledged ... [o]r conversely: is it possible to do *fat activism* ‘wrong’?” (emphasis in original; *ibid.*). Can it be that in order to be a fat or body positivity activist online, one can “stretch” only so far the conception of what an activist is supposed to look like? In the article, I contemplated the role of specific social media platforms in how they might limit the possibilities of doing “recognizable” activism (*ibid.*). However, in light of what I wrote in the previous paragraph, I think the issue is more complex and also has to do with the interplay of different intersections, and how they contribute to activists’ (in)visibility (online and off).

I do want to make it clear that as interesting as the concept and phenomenon of reverse appearance capital might be in the social media activism realm, the social capital related to fatness rarely constitutes legal tender in the offline world. Rather, fat people (and women in particular) face inappropriate behavior and outright discrimination upon leaving home. The fat activist status, associated with trailblazing and quick wits, powerful in the online environment, is switched to an identity of an “ordinary” fat woman – which, in turn, predisposes the person to being seen, once again, through the prevailing negative, gendered, and racialized (as well as potentially ableist and ageist, among others) stereotypes.

For an illustrative instance of this point, let me circle back to Article II, in which activist Caroline Suinner recounts why they had not participated in

⁷⁴ Earlier, I made a brief allusion to the division between so-called “good fatties” and “bad fatties” (e.g., Bias, 2014). Obviously, this dichotomy does not reflect the real-life variation among fat people. Instead, its purpose is to illustrate how anti-fat societal attitudes often translate into stereotyping fat people and putting them into two distinct categories: while the good fatties aspire to become thin(ner) and are vocal about this endeavor, the bad fatties have no weight loss intentions nor a need to play the “healthy eater” in public, for instance. I bring this up because activist Vinny Welsby (2021) has provided an additional layer to the bravery discussion by claiming that it is specifically the “bad fatties” who are commended and celebrated for being brave. Unfortunately, Welsby does not elaborate further on this point, but it is interesting to consider the idea that the audience would afford social capital to activists based on regarding them as bad fatties – especially since, as Welsby (*ibid.*) writes, “[b]ad fatties are seen as less productive members of society and therefore less valuable. Judged as morally inferior.”

designated healthcare group appointments for two weeks: “basically the reason is that I’m anxious about standing in front of people and being weighed” (p. 11; translation AP). Suinner is a vocal and confident activist on several online platforms, such as podcasting and Instagram: it is clear that their work is considered inspiring by many. However, Suinner recognizes that when they take part in a meeting centered around weight and attended by other people (assumedly deeming fat as bad and therefore wanting to rid themselves of it), they no longer hold the social capital they have acquired in the activist world.

6 CONCLUSION: ACTIVIST RESISTANCES

As the dissertation is drawing to a close, it is time to recapitulate the research questions posed in subsection 1.1 and ponder on how to answer them. The four questions were:

- (1) How is anti-fat bias resisted in relation to those “outside” the movement?
- (2) What meaning negotiations take place regarding the movement’s fundamentals within it?
- (3) How can the presence of activists’ own anti-fat bias, or ambivalence, be conceptualized?
- (4) What convergences are there between the Finnish and non-Finnish resistances, if any?

The main answers to the research questions are summarized in Table 4 below. On the basis of Article I, the response to the first question is: anti-fat bias is resisted in relation to those “outside” the movement through the four discursive strategies of confrontation, instruction, seeking harmony, and introspection. The confrontation strategy entails counterspeech directed at the critics of the movement and is characterized by strong expressions of disagreement, frustration, and even rage. The language is colorful and includes profanity at times. The strategy of instruction, in comparison, is more analytical in tone. This is because instruction aims to inform and educate the critics, and ultimately help them grasp the core ideas behind the body positivity movement. The third strategy is termed seeking harmony: here the activists deliberately avoid antagonizing the critics (which they do in the confrontation strategy) and rather aspire for an environment conducive to constructive conversations. While this strategy may appear meek at first glance, it is also a resistant one since its purpose is to spread the activist message, although through a different set of tactics. Finally, the importance of introspection as a discursive strategy lies in that activists re-interpret the outsider critics’ position: when activists remain cognizant of the systemic nature of anti-fat bias – as opposed to individual anti-fat prejudice – they can tailor their responses to accommodate that fact.

Yet another resistant strategy which surfaced after the publication of the original articles is that of humor. In line with earlier research on humor in activism (Lyytimäki, 2018; Sørensen, 2016), I posit that in the context of Finnish body positivity activism, too, the use of humor (i) points to where things are going wrong, (ii) enables the questioning of commonly held “truths,” and (iii) also exists for the activists themselves and not only for articulating the movement’s central points more “palatably” to the outsider critics and/or the general public. Since humor as resistance can be significantly less direct than the other oppositional tactics, I call it an oblique form of resistance. Another type of oblique resistance in relation to those outside the movement is silence or non-communication. As the name suggests, non-communication with the audience entails that the activist deliberately does not engage in social interaction on their social media site(s). However, since non-communication as a theme arose after the Finnish data sets had already been analyzed, it was not a specific point of interest in this study but would certainly merit further looking into.

The second research question is a synthesizing one since its reply is based on Articles I and II. I discerned three main threads of counterspeech related to meaning contestations regarding the movement’s fundamentals and directed at the movement’s sympathizers or insiders. The first is the general reminder to all body positivity people that the movement does not only concern those who are fat but should extend to all types of embodiments, regardless of their shape or size: fat, thin, muscular, short, and tall. The second strand of counterspeech challenges the insiders of the movement by demanding that other exclusions besides body shape and size also be heeded. In other words, this is a call for an intersectional approach and an attempt to link body positivity to an even larger frame of discriminations and human rights activism. The third meaning contestation centers around urging those in a privileged position within the movement to give space and visibility to the more marginalized lest they exacerbate the latter’s position in the movement and, in so doing, in society.

In relation to intra-movement resistance(s), I also brought up the role of the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle’s body positivity campaign the Scale Rebellion. I did not perceive direct resistance to the campaign from other activists, but there was disagreement on some basic tenets of the movement, such as whether losing weight is compatible with body positivity. In other words, meanings were perhaps not contested by explicitly claiming that the campaign interpreted the movement’s core ideas in a questionable way, but meaning negotiations did take place at the level of defining the fundamentals. My view is that the Scale Rebellion’s wide reach made it central in familiarizing Finns with the concept of body positivity. At the same time, the campaign’s interpretation of the movement’s cornerstones was not necessarily shared by all activists.

Third, I asked how intrapersonal or internal (one could also say intra-activist) resistance could be conceptualized. I reply to this question by presenting the findings of Article III: as Zembylas (2012) has convincingly argued, ambivalence seldom is an individual’s personal attribute; rather, it is tied to the many conflicting discourses which circulate simultaneously in society. The four

discourses discernable in Jenny Lehtinen's columns in Article III – the anti-“obesity,” fatphobic, size acceptance, and societal discourse – are a good example of how Zembylas' argument also holds for fatness-related ambivalence.

Furthermore, I posit that intrapersonal resistance, often conceptualized as a negative and unwanted phenomenon in activism, may in fact contain different kinds of potential (e.g., Murray, 2008; see also Maor, 2013b; Meleo-Erwin, 2014; Owen, 2015). Separating activist work from an individual's personal identity may make ambivalence easier to handle: when activism is seen to consist of deliberate action to improve the position of fat people (instead of a solid, unwavering “activist identity”), ambivalence regarding fatness may less likely cause activists to feel that their commitment to the cause is compromised, thus permitting them to continue their work. In addition, open communication about such internal contradictions could signal that activists do not consider themselves to be outside or above the norms concerning body shape and size; instead, they experience the same insecurities as almost everyone else in society. This could make body positivity activism more accessible even to those who have initial reservations about the movement. Lastly, recognizing the ambivalence felt by many toward fatness would make it possible to plan accordingly for future communication strategies, thus rendering activist work more persuasive and effective.

Fourth, I was also interested in cross-cultural convergences – should there be any – between Finnish and non-Finnish resistances. More concretely, I compared the elements of resistance discovered in Sofie Hagen's fat activism (Article IV) to those of the body positivity activists in Finland (Articles I–III). According to my findings, convergences indeed exist, yet they appear in varying degrees. For instance, offensive resistance (a rhetorical strategy featuring profanity) had a place in Articles I and II, while it was absent in Article III. Another activist strategy, doing fatness wrong, similarly played a part in both Article I and Article II, whereas in Article III it only played a modest role. In contrast, intrapersonal resistance, or ambivalence, was prominent in Article III. Article I alluded to it as well, although through the connected concept of introspection. Interestingly, Article II made little mention of ambivalence.

TABLE 4 Research questions and the main answers to the research questions (main findings; main contributions to the dissertation)

Research question #	Main research question	Main answers to the research question; main findings; main contributions to the dissertation ⁷⁵
1	How is anti-fat bias resisted in relation to those “outside” the movement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Confrontation ~ Instruction ~ Seeking harmony ~ Introspection + Humor (as oblique resistance) + Non-communication? (as oblique resistance)
2	What meaning negotiations take place regarding the movement’s fundamentals within it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Body positivity belongs to literally everybody ~ Body positivity activism should be used as a tool for change to combat anti-fat bias <i>and</i> other social injustices; it is not only about feeling good individually ~ The movement contributes to the further marginalization of the very bodies it is supposed to lift up + Scale Rebellion’s special role in the movement
3	How can the presence of activists’ own anti-fat bias, or ambivalence, be conceptualized?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Is the result of circulating, competing and contradicting, societal discourses ~ May hold many kinds of potential + Temporary phase in the journey to fat acceptance? → Does not seem plausible
4	What convergences are there between the Finnish and non-Finnish resistances, if any?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Offensive resistance ~ Doing fatness wrong ~ Ambivalence

⁷⁵ Items marked with ~ are findings that surfaced in the articles, whereas items marked with + are ones that emerged after writing the articles.

As noted earlier, a choice I made quite deliberately at the outset of this study was to pursue a general understanding of what was happening in the Finnish body positivity movement "scene" during its early years. This objective demanded that an extensive data set be collected. Although a substantial pool of research data does not automatically guarantee high-quality research, I am of the opinion that it does enhance the *credibility* of this study's findings (see, e.g., Mikkelsen, 2005), particularly since similar themes often arose in two or more of the articles.⁷⁶

At the same time, within the ambit of one dissertation, it was not possible to delve into individual phenomena as exhaustively as they would have merited. Consequently, future researchers would do well in focusing their academic attention on body positivity and fat activists' work through more detailed case studies. In the Finnish context, possible directions might include research on the intersection of fat embodiment and different genders (e.g., trans people's and [cis] men's engagement in body positivity activism is an understudied phenomenon); further studies on the intersection of fat embodiment, gender, and "race" and/or ethnicity in the body positivity activist sphere; as well as investigation into the intersection of fat embodiment and disability in activism (cf. Hynnä-Granberg, 2022b, p. 67).

As disciplines, gender studies and fat studies tolerate well the absence of "grand theories." My mosaic-like use of different theoretical frameworks⁷⁷ in the different articles was consistent with the aforementioned research task to grasp the Finnish online body positivity movement's early years as holistically as possible. I used my best researcher's judgment to link theory and data in a methodological (see, e.g., Koski, 2020) and meaningful way. The reader, of course, is encouraged to form their own opinion on whether this was a fruitful way to answer the research questions, or whether a more streamlined approach to theory selection – perhaps even a so-called grand theory – would have served that purpose better.

In the first paragraph of this dissertation, I stated I would not define resistance(s) from the get-go but would rather explore it/them throughout the study. Perhaps I was hoping that upon reaching the final pages, an immaculate, exact description would present itself. Something else happened instead. I discovered that resistances in activism do not lend themselves easily to definition. They are enchantingly multifarious and delightfully contradictory, sometimes

⁷⁶ Britha Mikkelsen (2005) has suggested that in the context of qualitative research, the more conventional validity and reliability criteria (which are often more suitable for quantitative research) be complemented by the additional quality criterion of credibility.

⁷⁷ I have termed this conceptual or theory scavenging. While the focus here is on the theoretical frameworks employed, conceptual scavenging draws inspiration from Cooper's (2021, pp. 30–31) scavenging qualitative methodology as well as Jason P. Murphy and Catherine A. Lugg's (2016) scavenging as queer methodology. Even though the meaning of scavenging per se is "searching through refuse for useful material" (Nyarai et al., 2016, p. 143), I obviously do not mean to imply that the theories I perused for this dissertation but ended up not using were refuse. Rather, as Edward J. Balleisen (2017, p. 110) has described it, conceptual scavenging has more to do with "the borrowing of interpretive approaches that help make sense of strands in a tangled past."

even paradoxical – including, in a sense, their own absence (ambivalence).⁷⁸ If there is one thing that I can confidently say about resistances in body positivity activism in Finland in the second half of the 2010s, it is, to the letter, that plural s.

⁷⁸ This multifacetedness bears a resemblance to “queer” and the (futile?) attempts to define it (e.g., Jagose, 1996). I thank Leena-Maija Rossi for establishing yet another important parallel between fat studies and queer studies by bringing up this matter.

SUMMARY IN FINNISH

Tässä väitöskirjatutkimuksessa tarkastellaan vastarintaa suomalaisessa verkko-pohjaisessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismissa 2010-luvun jälkipuolella. Tutkimuk-sessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismi ymmärretään tarkoituksellisiksi teoiksi, joiden päämääränä on lopettaa lihaviin ihmisten järjestelmällinen syrjintä. Tarkastelun pääkohteena on suomalaisessa verkkopohjaisessa kehopositiivisuusaktivismi-liikehdinnässä esiintyvät kolme vastarinnan muotoa: liikkeen ulkopuolinen, liik-keen sisäinen sekä henkilökohtainen. Lisäksi työssä vertaillaan suomalaisessa ke-hopositiivisuusaktivismissa ilmenevää vastarintaa sekä tanskalaisen stand up -koomikon ja lihavuusaktivistin Sofie Hagenin aktivismissa ilmenevää vasta-rintaa.

Väitöskirjatutkimuksen teoreettinen tausta sijoittuu yhteiskuntatieteellisen lihavuustutkimuksen, sukupuolentutkimuksen ja queer-tutkimuksen alueille. Monitapaustutkimus perustuu vuosina 2015–2020 internetissä julkaistuihin, akti-vistien tuottamaan aineistoon: kolumneihin, blogikirjoituksiin, YouTube-videoi-hin, podcasteihin ja Facebook-julkaisuihin. Tutkimusaineiston analyysissä käy-tetyt menetelmät ovat laadullinen sisällönanalyysi, diskurssianalyysi ja diskur-siiviset strategiat, korjaava luenta sekä dialoginen tematisointi.

Tutkimuksen tuloksista saadaan lisätietoa edellä mainituista kolmesta vas-tarinnan muodosta. Liikkeen ulkopuolinen vastarinta, joka nimensä mukaisesti suuntautuu ei-kehopositiivisuusaktivistisia tahoja kohtaan, tapahtuu pääasiassa neljällä eri tavalla. Niitä ovat konfrontaatio, opastus, sopusoinnun tavoittelu ja introspektio. Konfrontaatiostrategialle on ominaista suora vastapuhe liikettä kri-tisoineille tahoille, ja sitä luonnehtivat voimakkaat erimielisyyden, turhautumi-sen ja jopa raivon ilmaukset. Konfrontaation kieli on värikästä ja siihen kuuluu toisinaan kiroilu. Opastusstrategia vuorostaan on sävyiltään neutraalimpaa ja analyttisempää kuin konfrontaatio: tämä johtuu siitä, että opastuksen tavoit-teena on yhtäältä oikaista väärinymmärryksiä ja toisaalta lisätä kriitikoiden ym-märrystä kehopositiivisuudesta. Eritoten juuri opastusstrategiaa käyttäen akti-vistit tulevatkin artikuloineeksi suomalaisen kehopositiivisuuden kivijalkoja, kuten että se on tarkoitettu aivan jokaiselle ja kaikenlaisille kehoille; ja että siinä on kyse oikeudenmukaisuudesta myös yhteiskunnallisella tasolla – ei ainoastaan yksilön.

Kolmas liikkeenulkoisen vastarinnan strategia on sopusoinnun tavoittelu. Nimensä mukaisesti sopusoinnun tavoittelussa on kyse vastakkainasettelun vält-tämisestä ja yhteisyyden sekä syvemmän molemminpuolisen ymmärryksen ha-kemisesta. Tämä ei kuitenkaan merkitse sitä, että aktivistit mukautuisivat arvos-telijoiden kielteisiin mielipiteisiin kehopositiivisuusliikkeestä: sen sijaan he käyt-tävät sopusoinnun tavoittelua yhtenä taktiikkana muiden joukossa, joiden avulla aktivismin keskeistä sanomaa voi välittää eteenpäin. Strategioista neljäs on int-rospektio, joka tarkoittaa aktivistin henkilökohtaista ja avointa lihavuuskammon tutkiskelua. Vastarintastrategian introspektiosta tekee se, että se saattaa toimia dialogin rakentajana vielä sopusoinnun tavoitteluakin tehokkaammin. Kun liikkeen arvostelijat havaitsevat kehopositiivisuusaktivistien myöntävän oman

alttiutensa kulttuurisille kauneusihanteille, ulkonäköpaineille ja lihavuuden kammolle (sen sijaan, että väittäisivät olevansa niiden tavoittamattomissa), yhteistä samaistumis- ja keskustelupintaa voi näin löytyä. Erityisesti näiden kahden viimeksi mainitun liikkeenulkoisen vastarinnan strategian – sopusoinnun tavoittelun ja introspektion – tarkastelu kontribuoi tutkimuskeskusteluihin, joissa pohditaan sitä, miten verkkokeskusteluja voidaan viedä eteenpäin kärjistämättä niitä entisestään.

Kun kaikki neljä tutkimusartikkelia oli julkaistu, niiden pohjalta nousi vielä yksi liikkeen ulkopuolisen vastustuksen strategia: huumori. Koska huumori voi vastarinnan muotona olla huomattavasti epäsuorempaa kuin muut edellä luetellut taktikat, kutsun sitä vinoksi vastarinnaksi.

Liikkeen sisäisen vastarinnan analyysi puolestaan paljastaa tutkimusaineistosta kolme erilaista vastapuhetyyppiä. Ensimmäisessä muistutetaan yleisesti kaikkia kehopositiivisuuden parissa toimivia siitä, että liike ei koske ainoastaan lihavia ihmisiä, vaan sen tulisi ulottua koskemaan kaikenlaisia ruumiillisuuksia muodosta tai koosta riippumatta: lihavia, laihoja, lihaksikkaita, lyhyitä ja pitkiä. Toinen liikkeen sisäisen vastapuheen variantti puolestaan haastaa “sisäpiiriläisiä” ottamaan huomioon myös muut liikkeestä ulossulkemiselle altistavat sosiaaliset eronteot kuin ruumiin koon ja muodon. Kyseessä on siis intersektionaalinen lähestymistapa sekä pyrkimys liittää kehopositiivisuus laajempaan ihmisoikeus- ja syrjimättömyyskehukseen. Kolmas vastapuhetyyppi taas koskee sitä, että etuoikeutetussa asemassa olevien tulisi antaa tilaa ja näkyvyyttä heille, jotka ovat marginaalissa. Muutoin he päätyvät heikentämään viimeksi mainittujen asemaa liikkeen sisällä ja sitä myöten koko yhteiskunnassa. Liikkeen sisäisen vastarinnan analyysi osallistuu tutkimuskeskusteluihin, joissa tarkastellaan aktivismin sisäisiä jännitteitä sekä vallan epätasa-arvoista jakautumista (usein vallitsevia valta-asetelmia mukaillen) yhteiskunnallisissa liikkeissä. Lisäksi analyysi tekee osaltaan näkyväksi feministisen verkkoaktivismin moniäänisyyttä ja syventää ymmärrystä sen monitahoisuudesta.

Liikkeen sisäisen vastarinnan osalta tuon myös esiin Ylen kehopositiivisuuskampanja Vaakakapinan merkityksen. Aineistosta ei noussut esiin suoraa vastapuhetta Vaakakapinaa kohtaan, mutta joitakin eroavaisuuksia ilmeni aktivistien näkemyksissä liikkeen peruseräistä, kuten siitä, ovatko laihduttaminen ja kehopositiivisuus yhteensopivia. Merkitysneuvotteluja ei siis niinkään käyty tavalla, jossa Vaakakapina olisi suoraan nimetty “epäkehopositiiviseksi”, vaan enemmänkin siten, että merkityskamppailut kehopositiivisuuden perusprinsipeistä nostettiin yleisemmin keskusteluun. Mielestäni Vaakakapinan valtakunnallinen laajuus ja Ylen suoma medianäkyvyys saivat aikaan sen, että kehopositiivisuus tuli suomalaisille tutuksi – ehkä voisi jopa sanoa, että Vaakakapina valtavirtaisti kehopositiivisuuden käsitteen Suomessa. Samaan aikaan se versio, jonka Vaakakapina kehopositiivisuudesta esitteli, ei välttämättä ollut eikä ole kaikkien aktivistien yhteisesti jakama.

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan myös ns. aktivistin sisäistä vastarintaa ja sitä, miten sitä voisi käsitteistää. Michalinos Zembylasia (2012) mukaillen esitän

artikkelissa III, että tällaisessa henkilön sisäisessä vastarinnassa, ristiriitaisuuksissa tai ambivalenssissa ei ole kyse yksilön henkilökohtaisista ominaisuuksista, vaan siitä, että yhteiskunnassa kiertää samaan aikaan useita, keskenään vastakaisiakin diskursseja. Artikkelissa esitellyt neljä diskurssia – lihavuudenvastaisuus, läskikammoisuus, lihavuuden hyväksyminen ja yhteiskunnallinen diskurssi – toimivat hyvänä esimerkkinä siitä, että Zembylasin argumentti pätee myös lihavuuteen liittyvään ambivalenssiin.

Aktivistin voi olla helpompaa toimia ristiriitaisuuden kanssa, jos hän erottaa aktivistisen työn omasta, henkilökohtaisesta identiteetistään. Kun aktivismi käsitteellistetään nimenomaan tarkoitukselliseksi teoksi lihaviin ihmisten yhteiskunnallisen aseman parantamiseksi, voi aktivistista työtä tehdä, vaikka ei kokisikaan omaavansa yhtenäistä ja lihavuuden (itsessään ja/tai muissa) täysin hyväksyvää aktivisti-identiteettiä. Lihavuutta kohtaan koetut ristiriitaisuudet eivät tällöin ole merkki epäonnistumisesta tai sitoutumisen puutteesta, vaan merkityksellistyvät odotettavissa oleviksi ajatuksiksi ja tunteiksi, joita ymmärrettävästi lähes kaikilla nyky-yhteiskunnassa herää.

Väitän, että aktivistin sisäinen vastarinta ei ole (ainakaan) yksinomaan kielteinen ilmiö, vaikka usein ambivalenssi mielletäänkin negatiiviseksi ja epähaluttavaksi asiaksi. Nähdäkseni ambivalenssiin kätkeytyy monenlaista potentiaalia. Yksi esimerkki on yllä mainittu introspektiostrategia. Kun aktivistit kertovat avoimesti omista ristiriitaisuuksistaan lihavuuteen liittyen, he osoittavat samalla, etteivät ole kauneusihanteiden yläpuolella. Tämä voi tehdä kehopositiivisuusaktivismista helpommin lähestyttävää myös niiden keskuudessa, jotka aluksi suhtautuvat varauksella yhteiskunnalliseen liikkeeseen. Toisaalta sen tunnistaminen, että moni ajattelee lihavuudesta ambivalentisti tai voittopuolisesti kielteisesti, voi auttaa suunnittelemaan viestintästrategioita sen mukaisesti mahdollisimman suostutteleviksi ja tehokkaiksi. Ambivalenssin tutkiminen kehopositiivisuusaktivismin kontekstissa tuottaa uutta tietoa, joka voi auttaa ymmärtämään ristiriitaisuuksissa piileviä mahdollisuuksia myös muussa aktivismissä – eritoten sellaisessa, jonka aihe koskettaa aktivistia syvän henkilökohtaisesti.

Osana tutkimusta analysoitiin yhteneväisyyksiä suomalaisessa ja ei-suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuus- ja lihavuusaktivismivastarinnassa. Vertasin stand up-koomikko ja lihavuusaktivisti Sofie Hagenin aktivismin vastarintastrategioita (artikkeli IV) suomalaisiin strategioihin (artikkelit I, II ja III). Yhteneväisyyksiä löytyi, mutta eriasteisesti eri aktivistien sisällöissä. Esimerkiksi päällekkäystä vastarintaa (*offensive resistance*), johon kuului olennaisena osana karkea kielenkäyttö, löytyi artikkeleista I ja II, mutta ei artikkelista III. Karkea kieli puuttui viimeksi mainitusta artikkelista todennäköisesti siksi, että aineisto on tuotettu Vaakakapinaa varten, ja Ylellä on selkeät kielenkäyttöohjeistukset.

Toinen Hagenin aktivistisisällöissä havaittu vastarinnan strategia, lihavuuden suorittaminen väärin (*doing fatness wrong*), ilmeni sekin artikkeleissa I ja II. Tulkitsen tämän johtuvan siitä, että niiden aineistossa oli lukuisia esimerkkejä eri tavoista, joilla ns. hyveellisen läskin (*good fatty*) stereotypiaa haastetaan, kuten syöminen julkisella paikalla ja pukeutuminen läpinäkyviin tai tiuk-

koihin vaatteisiin. Sitä vastoin artikkelissa III en samalla tavalla havainnut tällaista "uhmakkuutta". Syy voi olla aineiston ambivalentti yleissävy, joka vaimentaa mahdollisia lihavuuden väärin suorittamisen ilmauksia.

Aktivistin sisäinen vastarinta tai ambivalenssi, joka sekin oli yksi Hagenin strategioista, oli puolestaan vahvasti mukana artikkelissa III. Artikkelissa I risti riitaisuuteen viitattiin välillisesti introspektion käsitteen avulla. Artikkelissa II ambivalenssi ei juuri ilmennyt. Tämä voi johtua siitä, että teoreettisena viitekehystenä käytettiin hypernäkyvyyden ja -näkyttömyyden käsitteitä, jotka eivät niinkään painota henkilökohtaisen kokemuksen analysointia, vaan suuntaavat huomion rakenteisiin. Yhtäältä suomenkielisen kielialueen ulkopuolelle ulottuvat tutkimustulokset kontribuoivat keskusteluihin, joissa ollaan kiinnostuneita aktivististen vastarintastrategioiden kansainvälisestä vertailusta. Toisaalta tulosten pohjalta hahmottuu alustavasti kommunikoimattomuuden strategia: aktivisti ei - odotusten vastaisesti - aina ole yhteydessä yleisönsä sosiaalisen median alustallaan, vaikka some on lähtökohtaisesti tarkoitettu juuri kahdensuuntaiseen viestintään. Kommunikoimattomuudesta tarvitaan lisätutkimusta, mutta jo tällaisenaankin tulokset laajentavat käsitystä siitä, mitä vastarinta aktivismissä on ja voi olla.

Tämä tutkimus pureutui yhteiskunnallisesti tärkeään aiheeseen tehden osaltaan näkyväksi lihavien ihmisten itsensä tuottaman vastapuheen Suomessa. Tämä on merkittävää, sillä kehopositiivisuusaktivismi alkuun asti lihavuudesta puhuivat julkisuudessa valtaosin muut kuin lihavat henkilöt. Lisäksi julkista puhetta lihavuudesta hallitsi lääketieteellinen diskurssi, jossa lihavuus nähtiin kansanterveydellisenä ja -taloudellisena ongelmana. Väitöskirjatutkimus tuo olemassa olevaa tietoa kootusti esille sekä tuottaa uutta tietoa Suomen kontekstierityisistä teemoista, kuten "esi"kehopositiivisuudesta sekä lihavaan ruumiillisuuteen liittyvistä terminologisista kysymyksistä. "Varsinaista" kehopositiivisuusaktivismia edeltävän ajan tarkastelu on tärkeää, koska se osoittaa, että lihavuusaktivistisia kannanottoja oli Suomessa jo ennen vuotta 2016. Tämän aikaista esikehopositiivisuutta tai -lihavuusaktivismia tulisikin tarkastella lisää, jotta lihavuuteen negatiivisesti suhtautuvan diskurssin haastavan vastapuheen ajallinen jatkumo piirtyisi selkeämmin esiin. Lihavuuteen liittyvän kielenkäytön tutkiminen taas nivoutuu moneen keskeiseen elämänalueeseen: sanavalinnoilla on väliä, jotta esimerkiksi lihava asiakas tai potilas kokee tullessa asiallisesti kohdatuksi.

Väitöskirjatutkimusprosessin aikana nousi esiin lukuisia jatkotutkimusehdotuksia. On esimerkiksi syytä tutkia kehopositiivisuusaktivismia Suomessa yksittäistapaustutkimusmetodologian avulla, jolloin laajan yleiskuvan luomisen sijaan (mihin tässä työssä on keskitytty) analysoitaisiin esimerkiksi yksittäisen aktivistin luomia sisältöjä syvällisemmin. Niin ikään kiinnostavaa olisi ulottaa suomalaisen kehopositiivisuusaktivismi tarkastelu sisältöihin, jotka on tuotettu muulla kuin suomen kielellä. Lisätutkimusta tarvitaan myös erilaisten intersektioiden yhteisvaikutuksista suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuus- ja muussa aktivismissä: tällaisia risteämiä ovat lihavuuden ohella muiden muassa sukupuoli, "rotu" samoin kuin vamma tai vammattomuus.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

SUOMALAISTEN KEHOPOSITIIVISUUSAKTIVISTIEN VASTINEET KEHOPOSITIIVISUUDEN KRITIIKKIIN – ANALYYSI DISKURSIIVISISTA STRATEGIOISTA

by

Anna Puhakka, 2019

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Suomalaisten kehopositiivisuusaktivistien vastineet kehopositiivisuuden kritiikkiin

ANALYYSI DISKURSIIVISISTA STRATEGIOISTA

Anna Puhakka

Kehopositivisuuden – yhteiskunnallisen liikkeen, jonka tavoitteena on kehorauha jokaiselle – keskiössä on Suomessa ollut lihavuus, ja suuri osa suomalaisista kehopositiivisuusaktivisteista on lihavia naisia. Kehopositivisuus on saanut myös kritiikkiä osakseen: sitä on arvosteltu lihavuutta ihannoivaksi, laihdutusvastaiseksi sekä ei-lihavia henkilöitä syrjiväksi. Artikkelissani tarkastelen, millaisia diskursiivisia strategioita kehopositiivisuusaktivistit käyttävät vastatessaan saamaansa kritiikkiin. Analyysin tukena käytän Eve Kosofsky Sedgwickin korjaavan luennan teoriaa. Blogiteksteistä ja YouTube-videoista muodostuvasta aineistosta erottui neljä diskursiivista strategiaa: konfrontaatio, opastus, sopusoinnun tavoittelu sekä introspektio. Diskursiivisten strategioiden monipuolinen käyttö kytkeytyy suomalaisen, suomenkielisen kehopositiivisuuden peruseriaatteiden selkeämpään artikulointiin. Väitänkin, että kehopositiivisuuden kritiikki on tätä kautta ollut mukana kehopositiivisuusliikkeen elinvoimaistamisessa sen kyseenalaistamisen sijaan.

AVAINSANAT: KEHOPOSITIIVISUUS, AKTIVISMI, KEHOPOSITIIVISUUDEN KRITIIKKI, DISKURSIIVISET STRATEGIAT

Kehopositivisuus – yhteiskunnallinen liike, jonka tavoitteena on kehorauha kaikille – on viime vuosina tullut tutuksi suurelle yleisölle Suomessakin. Kehopositivisuus käsitteenä nousi suomalaisten tietoisuuteen laajasti vuonna 2017 Ylen lanseerattua Vaakakapina-kampanjansa, jonka iskulause oli ”Lopeta

laihutus, aloita elämä”.¹ Moni toivotti tervetulleeksi tämän kampanjan, joka tähtäsi kehorauhan ohella myös sen syrjinnän esiin nostamiseen, jolle marginalisoidut kehot altistuvat (ks. esim. Jaakkola 2016).

Toistaiseksi suuri osa suomalaisesta, suomenkielisestä kehopositiivisuusaktivismista (ja siten myös

¹ Vaakakapina toteutettiin vuoden 2017 aikana monikanavaisesti: kampanjasisältöä julkaistiin internetissä, televisiossa ja radiossa. Kampanjan kotisivulla (Yle n.d.) lukija toivotetaan tervetulleeksi ”tekemään Suomen suurinta painonhallinnan ja kehopositiivisuuden [sic] vallankumousta”. Vaakakapina siis yhtäältä kannusti osallistujia painonhallintaan elämäntapamuutosten kautta ja toisaalta kutsui itseään kehopositiivisuuden kumoukseksi. Tutkimusnäyttöön pohjautuva (ks. esim. Yle 2017a) painonhallintanäkökulma (ja sitä kautta kansanterveydellinen aspekti) on nähdäkseni ensisijainen syy, miksi julkisrahoitteinen Yle kehitti Vaakakapinan (vrt. esim. Ylen tehtävä [Yle 2017b]). Laajan näkyvyytensä ansiosta kampanja tuli valtavirtaistaneeksi kehopositiivisuus-käsitteen.

sen kritiikistä [Shemeikka 2018, 4]) on keskittynyt lihavuuden tematiikkaan. Tämä on ymmärrettävää historian valossa, sillä kehopositiivisuus on ikään kuin yksi, melko viimeaikainen juonne lihavuus- tai läskiaktivismin moninaisessa kokonaisuudessa (Cooper 2016). Kehopositiivisuusliike rakentuu läskiaktivismin muodostamalle pohjalle. Viimeksi mainitulla puolestaan on vuosikymmenten pituinen historia: sen yhdeksi alkupisteeksi on ehdotettu vuoden 1967 Fat-Iniksi nimettyä kokoontumista New Yorkin Keskuspuistossa, jonka tarkoitus koollekkusujansa Steve Postin mukaan oli vastustaa lihavien kokemaa syrjintää (Cooper 2008).

Myös Suomen kehopositiivisuusaktivisteista valtaosa on lihavia valkoisia naisia, vaikka esimerkiksi alkuvuodesta 2019 Helsingissä pidetyt Body Posi-messut lähestyivät kehollisuutta laajasti tuoden esiin näkökulmia ja kokemuksia myös rodullistetuilta, miehiltä, transihmisiltä ja pyörätuolia käyttäviltä (Body Posi Suomi ry n.d.a.). Kehopositiivisuusaktivistien demografia on samankaltainen myös muualla. (Alentola 2017, 28–29; Cwynar-Horta 2016; Williams 2017.) Naisten vahva edustus ei ole yllättävää, sillä aiempi tutkimus osoittaa, että ruumiin kokoon ja painoon liittyvät tulkinnat ovat sukupuolittuneita. Jeannine Gailey (2014) on tutkinut lihaviiden naisten paradoksaalista kokemusta siitä, miten he samaan aikaan ovat sekä hypernäkyviä että -näkyttömiä – näkyviä ruumiinkokonsa vuoksi, mutta näkyttömiä siksi, että heidän mielipiteensä ja näkemyksensä eivät pääse esille. Hannele Harjunen (2009) taas painottaa muun muassa median roolia nimenomaan naisille kohdistetussa lihavuus- ja laihdutuspuheessa. Susan Bordo (1993) on puolestaan esittänyt, että juuri naisten kehon ulkomuoto on ollut tiiviisti sidoksissa yhteiskunnalliseen tilanteeseen ja muutoksiin: mitä enemmän naisten toimintapiiri on laventunut, sitä ahtaammaksi ovat käyneet ruuminormit. Koska lihavuus on ilmiönä vahvasti sukupuolittunut, lihavan ruumiillisuuden ja sukupuolen intersektion tarkastelu on tärkeää.

Kehopositiivisuus on kuitenkin saanut osakseen myös arvostelua. Erityisesti lääketieteen ja liikunnan aloilta tulevat kritiikot ovat kyseenalaistaneet liikkeen olemassaolon oikeutuksen kovasanaisestikin. Esimerkiksi *Helsingin Sanomien* kolumnissa kehopositiivisuudessa sanottiin olevan ”paljon samaa

ehdottomuutta kuin aikanaan kieltolaissa” (Laukka 2018). Tähän kritiikkiin ovat kehopositiivisuusaktivistit vuorostaan reagoineet omilla foorumeillaan, kuten blogeissaan ja YouTube-kanavillaan.

Tässä tutkimuksessa kysynkin, millaisia diskursiivisia strategioita (mm. Carvalho 2005) suomalaiset, suomen kieltä käyttävät kehopositiivisuusaktivistit käyttävät vastatessaan kehopositiivisuutta kritisoville tahoille internetissä. Tulokset osoittavat, että näitä strategioita on useita, ja väitän, että kehopositiivisuuden kritiikki on itse asiassa ollut mukana kehopositiivisuusliikkeen elinvoimaistamisessa, sillä aktivistit ovat kritikoille puhuessaan artikuloineet selkeämmin kehopositiivisuuden kulmakiviä juuri diskursiivisia strategioita monipuolisesti käyttäen.

Analysoin aineistoani – blogitekstejä ja YouTube-videoita – diskurssianalyttisestä näkökulmasta, joka teoreettisesti ponnistaa eritoten queer-tutkimuksen parissa toimineen Eve Kosofsky Sedgwickin (1997; 2003) uuden löytämiseen rohkaisevan korjaavan luennan käsitteestä (*reparative reading*). 1990-luvulla ensimmäisen kerran teemasta kirjoittanut Sedgwick havaitsi kriittisten teoreetikkojen taipumuksen keskittyä yhteiskunnallisiin epäkohtiin ja epäoikeudenmukaisuuteen niin vahvasti, että se muistutti jo vainoharhaisuutta. Tätä hän kutsui paranoidiksi luennaksi (emt.). Sedgwick (2003, 144) peräänkuulutti tämän tilalle reparatiivista eli korjaavaa luentaa: hänen mukaansa tutkijoiden olisi perusteltua tarkastella myös sitä, mikä yhteiskunnassa on nykytilaa kohentavaa ja mielihyvää tuovaa. Sedgwickin ajattelu on vaikuttanut tämän artikkelin tutkimusmetodiin metatasolla, laajentamalla tarkastelukulmaani kehopositiivisuuskeskusteluun. Hänen pohdintansa on kannustanut minua havaitsemaan ja haastamaan omat ennako-oletukseni – ”vainoharhaisuuteni” – muun muassa siitä, että kehopositiivisuuskeskustelun osapuolten välillä vallitsee välttämätön vastakkainasettelu.

KEHOPOSITIIVISUUS SUOMESSA

Yksi varhaisista suomalaisista teksteistä, joissa nostettiin esiin lihavuussyrjintää, oli *Image*-lehdessä ilmestynyt ”Läskisota” (Hiltunen 2007). Sen ohella myös muita läskiaktivismista inspiroituneita ja kehopositiivisuutta entelleviä tekstejä alkoi ilmestyä

suomenkielisessä ”fatosfäärissä” (engl. *fatosphere*; so. lihavuuteen liittyvä internet-pohjainen kirjoittelu, eritoten blogimaailma [Harding & Kirby 2009]). Esimerkiksi vuonna 2009 alkoi ilmestyä *More to Love* -lifestyle-blogi, joka keskittyi lihaviin muotiin ja kauneuteen (engl. *fashion*; *More to Love* n.d.). Parempaa elämänlaatua ja terveyttä painottavaa sekä laihdutuskeskeisyyttä kritisoivaa Health At Every Size -ajattelua kannattava *Hefty Training* -blogi vuorostaan käynnistyi neljä vuotta myöhemmin (esim. *Hefty Training* 2013). Javiera Marchant Aedon (2014) blogi taas käsitteli kriittisin äänenpainoin muun muassa hänen bariatrisen leikkauksen prosessiaan sekä lihavuuden yhteiskunnallista negatiivista arvottamista.²

Vuonna 2016 Suomen kehopositiivisuusrintamalla tapahtui paljon: Raisa Omaheimon *Läskimnologia* sai ensi-iltansa, Jenny Lehtinen nosti *Marja Hintikka Live* -ohjelmassa lihavuusteemaa esiin ja Jenny ja Läskimyitinmurtaajat -Facebook-ryhmä (nyk. Kehomyitinmurtaajat) perustettiin. Seuraavana vuonna Ylen Vaakakapina-kampanja teki kehopositiivisuutta laajasti tunnetuksi (Yle 2018). Tällä hetkellä Suomen fatosfääri laajenee entisestään. Vaikka Ylen kehopositiivisuuteen liittyvää sisältöä (Vaakakapina, Jenny+) esitettiin myös televisiossa ja radiossa, suuri osa tämän hetken suomalaisesta kehopositiivisuuskeskustelusta käydään internetissä. Kehopositivisuusmateriaalia on luettavissa blogeissa, katsottavissa YouTubessa ja Yle Areenassa, selattavissa sosiaalisessa mediassa – erityisesti Instagramissa ja Facebookissa – sekä kuunneltavissa podcasteina. Hienoista siirtymää myös internetin ulkopuolelle on (vrt. esim. Harlow 2012; Rane & Salem 2012); siitä esimerkkinä Suomen ensimmäiset kehopositiivisuusmessut Helsingissä tammikuussa 2019 (Body Posi Suomi ry n.d.b.).

KEHOPOSITIIVISUUDEN KRIITIKKI JA SOSIAALISEN MEDIAN KESKUSTELUKULTTUURI

Ulkomaisissa tutkimuksissa on havaittu, että lihavuusaktivistit etsivät internetistä niin sanottua

turvallista tilaa jakaakseen kokemuksiaan rohkaisevassa ympäristössä (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015; Dickins ym. 2011; Donaghue & Clemitshaw 2012; Meleo-Erwin 2011). Tilanne on erilainen Suomessa, jossa kehopositiivisuusaktivistit ovat näkyviä yhteiskunnallisia toimijoita, jotka esiintyvät pääsääntöisesti omalla (koko) nimellään. Ylen Vaakakampanja vaikutti suomalaiseen keskusteluilmapiiriin tekemällä sen keulahahmon, Jenny Lehtisen, näkyväksi. Ylen tuottama sisältö ja kehopositiivisuusaktivistien sosiaalisen median kanavat ovat olleet vuorovaikutuksessa keskenään (intermediaalisuudesta ks. esim. Herkman 2010), ja tilanteeseen on vaikuttanut myös Suomen mediakentän pienuus verrattuna esimerkiksi pohjoisamerikkalaisiin mediakanaviin.

Kehopositivisuutta kohtaan on esitetty myös kritiikkiä. Erityisen vilkasta keskustelu oli vuonna 2018, esimerkiksi kyseisen vuoden kesänä *Helsingin Sanomien* kolumni- ja mielipidepalstoilla (Kokko 2018). Usealla arvostelijoista on lääketieteen tai liikunnan alan koulutus, mikä heijastuu heidän kannanotoissaan. Monissa kriittisissä puheenvuoroissa kehopositiivisuuden nähdään olevan sinänsä tervetullutta, mutta sen pelätään ”menneen liian pitkälle”. Niissä kriitikoiden kirjoituksissa, joihin kehopositiivisuusaktivistit vuorostaan vastaavat, esiin tulevat keskeisimmät väitteet voidaan ryhmitellä seuraaviin kategorioihin:

- 1) Kehopositivisuus merkitsee lihavuuden ihannoitua (Pastak 2018; Toimitus 2017).
- 2) Kehopositivisuus yllyttää lihavana pysymiseen sekä pyrkii häivyttämään lihavuuden terveydelle aiheuttamat haitat, jotka vuorostaan kuormittavat verovaroilla ylläpidettävää julkista terveydenhuoltoa (Laukka 2018; Pastak 2018).
- 3) Kehopositivisuusaktivistit ovat laihdutusvastaisia, ja kehopositivisuus yhteiskunnallisena liikkeenä syrji ei-lihavia henkilöitä (*fit shaming*; Pastak 2018).

² Käytän tässä artikkelissa sekä kehopositiivisuuden että läskiaktivismin käsitteitä. Suomen kontekstissa ”kehopositiivisuus” on yleisimmin käytetty, mutta myös läski- ja lihavuusaktivismi-termejä esiintyy. Perustelen tätä rinnakkaiskäyttöä Charlotte Cooperin (2016) aiemmin esittelemälläni näkemyksellä, että läskiaktivismi on varsin moninaista, ja kehopositiivisuus yksi sen useista muodoista.

Koska tämän artikkelin aiheena on kehoposiivisuusaktivistien kritikoilleen antamat vastineet sosiaalisessa mediassa, on näiden vastineiden analyysi syytä asettaa osaksi somekeskusteluista tehtyä aiempaa tutkimusta. Tässä yhteydessä huomionarvoinen piirre on internetissä yleisesti ja sosiaalisessa mediassa erityisesti käytyjen keskusteluiden kärjystymistäipumus. Susanna Paasonen (2012, 69) on todennut, että verkossa ”vastenmielisyyden ilmauksilla on tapana vahvistua keskustelijoiden kommentoidessaan toisiaan, tukiessaan toistensa näkemyksiä ja pyrkiessä eräällä tapaa ylittämään toistensa näkemykset” (ks. myös Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 49). Samaan aikaan valtava määrä toimijoita kilpailee saadakseen seuraajia, ja provosoivuus kasvattaa yleisöä todennäköisemmin kuin maltillisuus (ks. esim. Maasilta 2012, 51).

Suomalaisessa kontekstissa kiivaiden verkko- ja somekeskusteluiden tutkimusteemoihin lukeutuvat kehoposiivisuuden ohella muiden muassa maahanmuuttokysymykset (Horsti & Nikunen 2013; Nikunen 2015), naisviha useine muotoineen (Aalto 2018; Sundén & Paasonen 2018; Vainikka 2019) sekä rasismi (Aalto 2018; Rinne & Ruha 2017). Moninaisten risteävien erojen on havaittu ruokkivan toisiaan ja voimistavan vihapuhetta (Lähdesmäki & Saresma 2014). Verkon vihapuhe voikin vaikuttaa erityisen voimakkaasti niihin, jotka ovat haavoittuvassa asemassa (Savimäki ym. 2018).³

DISKURSIIVISET STRATEGIAT JA KORJAAVA LUENTA

Tutkin tässä artikkelissa kehoposiivisuusaktivistien käyttämiä diskursiivisia strategioita. Diskursiivisen strategian käsite on noussut esiin eritoten kriittisen diskurssianalyysin piirissä (Carvalho 2005). Tässä tutkimuksessa nojaudun Anabela Carvalhoon (2005, 3), joka on määritellyt diskursiivisen strategian muutoksentekeväksi diskursiiviseksi siirroksi

(*a transformative discursive move*), johon liittyy sanojen merkitysten uudelleenmäärittelyä. Nähdäkseni suomalaiset kehoposiivisuusaktivistit tekevät tällaista uudelleenmäärittelyä jatkuvasti muun muassa viestiessään kritikoille, että kehoposiivisuus koskettaa kaikkia, ei ainoastaan lihavia kehoja. Lisäksi diskursiivisiin strategioihin liittyy olennaisesti todellisuuden diskursiivinen muokkaaminen tietyn tavoitteen saavuttamiseksi (ema.). Aktivistien tavoitteena on saada kriitikot ymmärtämään paremmin kehoposiivisuuden päämääriä sekä omaksumaan sen sanoma myötämielisemmin.

Diskursiivisia strategioita on käytetty aiemminkin välineenä tarkasteltaessa lihavuutta ilmiönä. Affulin ja Ricciardellin (2015) artikkeli käsitteli yhdysvaltalaisen ja kanadalaisen *fat acceptance*-bloggareiden käyttämiä, muilta yhteiskunnallisilta liikkeiltä (feministinen, queer- sekä antirasistinen) lainaamia diskursiivisia strategioita, joita he hyödynsivät medikalisoitun lihavuusdiskurssin haastamisessa. Christina Ting Kwaukin (2012) työ vuorostaan analysoi niitä diskursiivisia strategioita, joiden avulla kansainväliset terveydenhuollon toimijat – kuten Maailman terveysjärjestö WHO – legitimoiivat Tyynenmeren alueella asuvien elämäntyylien ja ”obeesien” kehojen arvostelun sekä niihin puuttumisen. Karen Throsbyn (2007) artikkelin fokuksena puolestaan oli nykyisten tai entisten lihaviin henkilöiden itsensä käyttämät diskursiiviset strategiat tilanteessa, jossa he pohtivat oman lihavuutensa alkusyytä samalla kiistäen lihavuuden johtu- van moraalittomuudesta.

Tutkimuksessani Eve Kosofsky Sedgwickin (1997; 2003) korjaava (tai reparaatiivinen) luenta ohjaa diskursiivisten strategioiden erittelyä. Viime vuosi- na korjaava luenta on noussut niin suosituksi teoria- ja tulkintakehykseksi sukupuolen- sekä queer-tutkimuksessa, että on jopa puhuttu reparaatiivisesta käänteestä (Hennessy 2017; Karkulehto & Rossi 2017). Korjaavan luennan käsitteen synnyn taustalla oli

3 Sen kysymyksen käsittely, ovatko tässä artikkelissa analysoidut kehoposiivisuuskritiikot kannanotot (ja/tai niiden vastineet) varsinaisesti vihapuhetta, vaatisi enemmän tilaa kuin mitä käytettävissä on, sillä vihapuheen määritelmät vaihtelevat merkittävästikin (vrt. esim. Poliisi n.d.; Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 49). Nimettömyyden on nähty lisäävän aggressiivisuutta verkossa (Paasonen 2014, 27), mutta kyseinen argumentti ei selitä tässä tutkittujen keskustelujen kiivautta, sillä sekä kehoposiivisuuskritiikot että -aktivistit esiintyvät kahta lukuun ottamatta koko nimillään. Muiden muassa Shepherd ym. (2015) ovat pohtineet sitä, miksi ja miten verkkoviha syntyy.

Aineistotyyppi	Blogin / YouTube-kanavan nimi	Analysoitujen blogipostausten / videoiden otoskoko (kpl)
Blogi	Body Posi Suomi ry	5
Blogi	Sagamaraia/Saga Raippalinnna	43 (Kehopositiivisuus-kategoria)
YouTube-video	Nerdinplussize	51
YouTube-video	Onnellinen siili	39
YouTube-video	Vatsamielenosoitus	38

Taulukko 1. Tutkimuksen aineisto

Sedgwickin (2003, 125) huomio siitä, että kriittisessä teoriassa vainoharhaisesta (tai paranoidisesta) lukutavasta oli tullut suorastaan imperatiivi. Sedgwick (ema., 128) kuitenkin painotti, että on täysin mahdollista olla tietoinen olemassa olevasta syrjinnästä ja vihanpidosta ja samaan aikaan rakentaa tiedontuotannon perusta muulle kuin vainoharhaisuudelle. Toisin sanoen rakenteellisen sarron havaitseminen ei suinkaan edellytä paranoidista epistemologiaa (ema., 127).

Sedgwickin (ema.) mukaan paranoidinen luenta ei niinkään ollut korvannut muita tulkinnan tapoja, vaan se oli epäonnistunut niiden tunnistamisessa. Minua kiinnostavatkin nämä toisenlaiset tulkinnan ja tiedontuotannon tavat – tässä artikkelissa erityisesti korjaava luenta –, sillä se auttaa tutkijaa pysymään ”hereillä” moniäänisen aineiston äärellä. Leena-Maija Rossi on tähdentänyt, että korjaava luenta ”pyrkii kohentamaan olemassa olevaa tilannetta” (2017, 3). Samalla kuitenkin ollaan avoimia uudelle (ema.), yllätyksillekin (Valovirta 2006). Tämä on ollut minulle tärkeää analyttisen viitekehyksen valinnassa, varsinkin koska kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä on toisinaan syytetty tutkimustyön alistamisesta ennalta päätetyille poliittisille motiiveille (mm. Poole 2010). Diskursiivisen strategian käsite on peräisin kriittisestä diskurssianalyysistä, ja siten arvostelun voidaan katsoa koskevan välillisesti myös omaa työtäni.

AINEISTO

Tässä tutkimuksessa aineiston valinnan perustana on ollut sukupuolen ja lihavuuden risteymän intersektionaalinen tarkastelu – kuten aiemmin todettu, lihavuus on ilmiönä vahvasti sukupuolittunut. Kaikki aktivistit, joiden tuottamia sisältöjä analysoin, ovat lihavia naisia. Lisäksi tutkimukseen valikoituivat tahot, jotka kutsuvat itse itseään kehopositiivisuusaktiiviteiksi. Kuten taulukosta 1 käy ilmi, aineisto muodostui viiden eri tahon tuottamista suomenkielisistä sisällöistä: Body Posi Suomi ry:n, Sagamaraian (eli Saga Raippalinnan), Nerdinplussizen, Onnellisen siilin sekä Vatsamielenosoituksen. Näistä kaksi ensin mainittua ovat blogeja ja kolme viimeistä YouTube-kanavia. Katsoin YouTube-videot läpi vähintään kaksi kertaa, minkä jälkeen litteroin relevantit kohdat. Analyysiosiossa olen merkinnyt kunkin aineistokatkelman yhteyteen, onko kyseessä kirjoitettu blogiteksti vai litteroitu video.⁴

On huomattava, että yhtäältä kehopositiivisuuden merkityksestä ja toisaalta sen ja läskiaktiivisuuden keskinäisestä suhteesta käydään jatkuvaa, aktiivista keskustelua (Alentola 2017; Baker 2017; Cooper 2016; Eranti 2017; Hoffman 2018; Kangasniemi 2019; Omaheimo & Särämä 2017). Tämän artikkelin aineistoksi valitsin sellaiset kanavat, joilla tulkitsein olevan yhteinen, jaettu käsitys kehopositiivisuuden ytimestä: kyseessä on idea, aate ja/tai yhteiskunnallinen

4 Tampereen yliopiston mediakasvatuksen yliopistonlehtori Reijo Kupiainen on nostanut haastattelussa esiin merkittävän eron videoblogien (vlogien) ja perinteisempien tekstiblogien välillä: ”Tarinaa kerrotaan myös eleillä ja ilmeillä. Silloin ilmaisu on persoonallisempi kuin se ehkä kirjoitettuna olisi” (Honka 2013). Tässä artikkelissa eleet ja ilmeet jäivät kuitenkin YouTube-videoiden (vlogien) analyysin ulkopuolelle – käsitelin siis videoita puhtaasti tekstinä.

5 Moni muukin on antanut vastineensa kehopositiivisuuden kritiikkiin (esim. Heiko 2018; Kauko 2018; Sieluni silmin 2018), mutta tässä artikkelissa halusin tarkastella sitä, miten kritiikkiin vastaavat nimenomaan ne henkilöt, jotka todennäköisimmin ovat todella paneutuneet kehopositiivisuuteen, eivätkä ainoastaan käsitelleet aihetta sivumennen. Tästä syystä aineiston valintaan ei vaikuttanut myöskään aktivistien viestintäkanavien seuraajamäärä.

liike, joka perää kaikenlaisten kehojen oikeutta olla olemassa syrjinnästä vapaina. Kaikki kanavat ovat myös ”läskierityisiä” aktivistien omaan kokemusasiantuntijuuteen pohjautuen.⁵

Aineiston lisävalintakriteerinä oli sen suhteellinen pysyvyys. Myös Instagramista löytyy runsaasti suomenkielisiä kehopositiivisuusmateriaalia, mutta valitsin analysoitaviksi blogit ja YouTube-videot, koska osa Instagramin materiaalista on Instagram Storiesissa, joka katoaa vuorokausi julkaisemisensa jälkeen (Seppänen 2018, 13). Lisäksi tällaiseen aineistoon käsiksi päästäkseen on luotava Instagram-tili ja seurattava kyseistä sisällöntuottajaa. Samasta syystä myös Facebook rajautui tutkimusaineiston ulkopuolelle. Toimivan internet-yhteyden tuli riittää kaiken aineiston saavuttamiseksi.

Aineistoni tutkittavat toimivat omilla nimillään julkisella foorumilla, mistä syystä heidän henkilötietojensa (tässä tapauksessa nimen) anonymisointi ei ole tarpeen. Toisaalta juuri tästä syystä heidät voidaan tunnistaa suoraan. Siispä tutkimukseeni liittyy henkilötietojen käsittelyä, johon sovelletaan Euroopan parlamentin ja neuvoston asetus 2016/679 luonnollisten henkilöiden suojelusta henkilötietojen käsittelyssä (EUR-Lex 2016).⁶

Artikkelin aineisto on ymmärrettävästi hyvin tuoretta, sillä kehopositiivisuuskeskustelua on käyty Suomessa tiiviimmin vasta viime vuosina. Tutkimukseen pääsivät aineistot, jotka oli julkaistu viimeistään 12.11.2018. Vaikka suuri osa kehopositiivisuuden suomalaisesta kritiikistä on julkaistu vuonna 2018 (ks. yllä), sisällytin aineistoon myös aiempina vuosina tuotetut tekstit ja videot valittujen kanavien olemassaolon ajalta.

Aineistoa valitessani käytin harkintaotantaa. Niin sanotussa criterion-i-otannassa (Palinkas ym. 2015, 535) painopiste on sellaisten tapausten (*case*) tunnistamisessa ja valitsemisessa, jotka täyttävät tietyn ennalta määritellyn tärkeyskriteeristön – tämän tutkimuksen tapauksessa siis sen, että aktivisti

ottaa kehopositiivisuuden kritiikkiin kantaa ja/tai käyttää sitä jollakin tapaa lähtökohtana omille pohdinnoilleen. Koska koko aineiston esittely yhdessä artikkelissa on mahdotonta, tässä tekstissä esitteliäni tekstilainauksen tavoitteena on tuoda esiin kutakin diskursiivista strategiaa kaikkein parhaiten edustavat esimerkit (ema.).

AINEISTON ANALYYSI JA POHDINTAA

Löysin tutkimusaineistosta kolme diskursiivista strategiaa, joita kehopositiivisuusaktivistit käyttävät vastatessaan kehopositiivisuutta kritisoiduille tahoille: *konfrontaatio*, *opastus* ja *sopusoinnun tavoittelu*. Lisäksi neljäntenä strategiana esittelen lyhyehkösti *introspektion*, jossa aktivistit pohtivat omaa suhdettaan lihavuuteen. Introspektiostrategian yhteydessä ei suoraan viitata kehopositiivisuuden kritiikoihin, mutta kyseinen kritiikki on selvästi pohdintojen katalysaattorina.

KONFRONTAATIO

Kuten sosiaalisen median keskusteluille on tyypillistä, kehopositiivisuudesta käyty verkkokeskustelu on usein polarisoitunutta (ks. esim. Paasonen 2012). Kehopositiivisuuden arvostelijoiden puheenvuoroissa on läsnä konfrontaatio, vastakkainasettelu, jo määritelmällisestikin – esittäväthän he kritiikkiä. Mutta värikästä kieltä käyttävät myös aktivistit. Seuraavassa otteessa Vatsamielenosoitus-kanavan pitävä vastaa bloggaajalle, jonka mukaan kehopositiivisuus merkitsee lihavuuden ihannointia (Pastak 2018):

Kehopositiivisuus ja lihavuuden ihannointi yhdistetään yhdeksi ja samaksi asiaksi, ja se ei pidä paikkaansa. Toi on täyttä dadaa, toi on mutua-tuntu-maa, toi on ”se fiilis mikä mulle tulee kun te läskit ette enää piiloudu sinne teidän kaapujenne alle

6 Suomen kansallisen tietosuojalain mukaan ”[h]enkilötietoja saa käsitellä tietosuojasetuksen 6 artiklan 1 kohdan e alakohdan mukaisesti, jos – – käsittely on tarpeen tieteellistä tai historiallista tutkimusta taikka tilastointia varten ja se on oikeasuhteista sillä tavoiteltuun yleisen edun mukaiseen tavoitteeseen nähden” (Finlex 2018; kursivointi kirjoittajan). Tietosuojasetuksen 6 artiklan 1 kohdan e alakohdan puolestaan kuuluu: ”Käsittely on lainmukaista ainoastaan jos ja vain siltä osin kuin vähintään yksi seuraavista edellytyksistä täyttyy: – – e) käsittely on tarpeen yleistä etua koskevan tehtävän suorittamiseksi tai rekisterinpitäjälle kuuluvan julkisen vallan käyttämiseksi – –”. (EUR-Lex 2016)

vaan näytte mun Instagramissa”. (Vatsamielenosoitus 2018, artikkelin kirjoittajan litteroima YouTube-video)

Konfrontaatiostrategiassa aktivisti ilmaisee turhautumisensa kehopositiivisuuskritiikin paikkaansapitämättömyyteen selväsanaisesti ja tunnepitoisesti. Kielenkäyttö on painokasta ja paikoin jopa töykeää (esim. ”täyttä dadaa”). Alla olevassa katkelmassa aktivisti taas asettuu vastustamaan kehopositiivisuuden väärin ymmärtänyttä lääkäriä, joka kirjoitti Suomen laajalevikkisimmässä sanomalehdessä muun muassa näin: ”Kehopositiivisuusaatteessa on paljon hyvää, mutta myös pulma. -- On huolestuttavaa, jos terveydenhuollossa lääkärit eivät enää uskalla ottaa painoa puheeksi tai se on korkeintaan salamyhkäistä hyssyttelyä” (Laukka 2018). Aktivisti tekee selväksi, että kehopositiivisuuden tarkoituksena ei ole estää lihavuudesta puhumista terveydenhuollon ammattilaisten kanssa:

Kehopositiivisuus ei ole liike joka yrittää muuttaa ihmiset lihaviksi. Se on liike, joka yrittää antaa lihavalle ihmiselle oikeuden hymyillä joskus ilman syyllisyyttä omasta ulkomuodostaan ja sen olemassaolon oikeuden epäminen keneltäkään on ennenkuulumattoman julmaa. Etenkin, jos sen tekee terveyden varjolla tuntematta lainkaan kritisoimiensa ihmisten maailmaa. (Raippalinna 2018, kirjoitettu blogiteksti)

Videoillaan tai blogikirjoituksissaan kehopositiivisuusaktivistit osoittavat olevansa eri mieltä ja tekevät sen sangen kärkevästikin (kuten ilmauksella ”ennenkuulumattoman julmaa”). Kirjoitus, johon alla olevan otteen kirjoittaja viittaa, sisältää näkemysten, jonka mukaan kehopositiivisuus ihannoii ja normalisoi lihavuutta, ja päättyy provosoivasti näin: ”Jokainen on arvokas kokoon, väriin, rotuun tai sukupuoleen katsomatta, mutta tämä lihavuuden selittely kehopositiivisuuden nimissä olisi jo aika saattaa päätökseensä. I rest my case” (Toimitus 2017). Aktivisti haastaa tämänkaltaisen kritiikin:

Tässä eilen julkaistiin sabotage.fi-sivustolla blogikirjoitus, jonka lainaan tähän kirjoitukseni joukkoon ihan vaan senkin vuoksi, etten voi asiaa

kommentoida ilman alkuperäistä tekstiä. Lisäksi tämä blogikirjoitus on niin täynnä väärinkäsityksiä sekä typeryydessään niin raivostuttava etten ole vielä useista yrityksistä huolimatta pystynyt lukemaan sitä kokonaisuudessaan. (Raippalinna 2017, kirjoitettu blogiteksti)

Tunnepitoinen ”typeryydessään niin raivostuttava” kieli konfrontaatiostrategian käytöstä. Susanna Paasonen (2012, 69–70) onkin todennut, että ”[n]ettikeskustelujen tai -- sosiaalisen median -- ilot eivät ylipäätään välttämättä liity viestinnän sisältöihin, vaan yhtäläillä niiden tyyliin ja *intensiteetteihin*” (kursivointi minun). Kaikkiaan yllä olevat aineisto-esimerkit näyttävät todentavan Paasonen (2012, 69) huomion siitä, että verkkokeskusteluissa vastakkainasettelut vahvistuvat sitä mukaa, kun keskusteluosapuolet pyrkivät ”päihittämään” vastapuolensa argumentaation.

OPASTUS

Aktivistien ja kriitikoiden välisessä vuoropuhelussa kiistakapulana tuntui usein olevan se, että osapuolilla ei ollut jaettua käsitystä siitä, mitä kehopositiivisuudella tarkoitetaan. Kriitikoille vastatessaan aktivistit tulivatkin artikuloineeksi suomalaisen kehopositiivisuuden kivijalkoja: se on tarkoitettu kaikenlaisille kehoille, siis kaikille ihmisille; se ei ihannoii lihavuutta; siinä on kyse oikeudenmukaisuudesta myös yhteiskunnallisella tasolla – ei vain yksilön. Nimesin tämän diskursiivisen strategian opastukseksi, sillä sen sävy on analyttisempi kuin tunnepitoisessa konfrontaatioissa, jossa vastakkainasettelu on tarkoituksellista.

Opastuksen tavoitteena on nimensä mukaisesti lisätä kriitikoiden ymmärrystä kehopositiivisuudesta. Aktivistit keskittyvät asiakysymyksiin toimien ikään kuin ”oppaina”, johdattelijoina tai neuvoina kehopositiivisuuteen. Tämä poiminto on osoitettu samalle taholle (Toimitus 2017), joka edellä kirjoitti samalta aktivistilta konfrontaationaalisen vastineen:

Ylipainoa ei ihannoii kukaan, eikä kehopositiivisuus ole sama kuin ylipainon ihannointi. Kehopositiivisuus ei myöskään ole mikään lihavien ihmisten omistama liike, vaan se on viesti kaikille, joilla

on keho ja erityisesti niille, jotka kokevat olevansa jotenkin väärä. – Kehopositiivisuus ei anna ihmisille lupaa lihoa vaan se antaa ihmisille vapauden olla vihaamatta itseään. (Raippalinna 2017, kirjoitettu blogiteksti)

Aktivistien opastavista puheenvuoroista näkyi, että puhe on kohdistettu kehopositiivisuuden arvostelijoiden ohella liikkeen ”sisäpiiriläisille”. Tämä ei ole kovin yllättävää, kun huomioi, että internet-sivustoille ja sosiaalisen median kanaville hakeutuvat todennäköisesti niiden aiheesta jo valmiiksi kiinnostuneet (Agur & Frisch 2019; Keating & Melis 2017; Norris 2003; Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 45–46). Esimerkiksi alla oleva postaus alkaa yleisluontoisilla esimerkkiteksteillä – yhtenä esimerkkinä vaikkapa ”Aika huolestuttavaa tällainen kehitys, koska ylipaino ei ole terveellistä kellekään”. Tällaiset lausumat oletetaan usein nimenomaan kehopositiivisuuden arvostelijoiden sanomiksi (vrt. Häkkänen 2018; Kettunen 2018; Laukka 2018; Nevalainen 2018; Pastak 2018). Postauksen kirjoittaja kuitenkin osoittaa, että lausahdukset voisivat olla kenen tahansa suusta – mukaan lukien niiden, jotka ovat kehopositiivisuuden keskeiselle sanomalle myötämielisiä. Kirjoittaja jatkaa: ”Kuulostaako tutulta? Todennäköisesti kyllä, koska tällaiseen puheeseenhan me olemme tottuneet ja mahdollisesti harrastamme sitä itsekkin, jopa huomaamattamme”. Myöhemmin tekstissään hän kirjoittaa:

Lienee myös paikallaan erikseen korostaa, että kehopositiivisuus ja kehorauha koskevat tosiaankin ihan kaikenlaisia vartaloita – jopa kehopositiivisissa keskusteluryhmissä tämä välillä unohtuu. Me kaikki kärsimme ahtaista kauneusihanteista ja kehonegatiivisuudesta, eikä hoikemman vartalon kommentointi ole yhtään sen sallitumpaa kuin runsaammaankaan [sic]. Tai lihaksikkaamman – varsinkin voimailevat naisoletetut törmäävät jatkuvasti ”miesmäisten lihasten” kauhusteluun ja ”naisellisuuden menettämiseen”. Bikinifitnes-vartaloita ihailaan, mutta niiden omistajia pidetään pinnallisina bimboina ja treenaavia miehiä vastaavasti tyhminä pullistelijoina. Lyhyiden lyhyttä päivitellään ja pitkien pituutta kauhustellaan. (Body Posi Suomi 2018, kirjoitettu blogiteksti)

Opastusstrategiassa aktivistit siis pyrkivät korjaamaan virheellisiä käsityksiä kehopositiivisuudesta, ja kielen sävy on neutraalin analyttinen. Edellä olevan katkelman tuntu lähentelee jopa virallista – ”[I]ienee myös paikallaan erikseen korostaa, että kehopositiivisuus ja kehorauha koskevat tosiaankin ihan kaikenlaisia vartaloita – etenkin kun sitä vertaa voimalliseen konfrontaatioon. Toki eroja sallittaan myös esimerkiksi se, onko kyseessä puhuttu ja sittemmin litteroitu vai suoraan luettavaksi tarkoitettu kirjoitettu materiaali.

Kenties vahvimman opastuksista antaa Nerdinplussize-kanavan aktivisti seuraavassa otteessa, jossa näen yhdistyvän viestin niin kehopositiivisuuden arvostelijoille kuin sen ”sisäpiiriläisillekin”:

Kehopositiivisuus niinku lähtökohtasestikin on paljon muuta kuin sitä että katellaan itteemme peilistä ja tunnetaan olomme vähän silleen paremmaks. Mutta siis kehopositiivisuuteenhan kuuluu paljon enemmänkin ku se että onko sulla nyt hyvä mieli ittestäs vai ei. Koska ytimessään kehopositiivisuushan pyrkii tuomaan marginalisoituja kehoja takasin keskustelun keskiöön, tuomaan niitten niinku kokemia epäkohtia esille ja nostamaan yhteiskunnassa niitä heikompia ihmisiä niinku päällimmäisiks, mikä on todella vahvasti juurtunut niinku isompiin täämmösiin syrjiviin rakenteisiin niinku esimerkiks rasismiin, tai ableismiin, tai muuhun tälläseen oikeasti isoja ihmisryhmiä koskeviin ongelmiin. – Mun mielestä on erittäin tärkeetä että kaikki ihmiset jotka haluais olla äänekkäitä kehopositiivisuudesta ymmärtäis, että se ei riitä, että meillä on vaan hyvä mieli ittestämme, ja onnistutaan niinku jotenki arvostamaan omien kehojemme ’virheitä’, jotka on keinotekosesti tuotettu tässä meidän kulttuurissa, vaan meidän pitää aktiivisesti tehdä työtä niille, jotka on meidän kulttuurissa vielä altavastaavassa asemassa, vaikka meillä ois jo hyvä mieli ittestämme. (Nerdinplussize 2018, artikkelin kirjoittajan litteroima YouTube-video)

Aktivistin pyrkimyksenä on purkaa myyttiä, jonka mukaan kehopositiivisuudessa olisi kyse vain yksilötason ilmiöstä (vrt. Omaheimo & Särnä 2017), ja siirtää siten kehopositiivisuuskeskustelu laajempaan

yhteiskunnalliseen kontekstiin. Yllä olevassa otteessa hän mainitsee kolmeen kertaan, että kehopositiivisuuden tarkoitus ei ole ainoastaan, että ”meillä on vaan hyvä mieli ittestämme”. Tällainen väärinkäsitys voi olla niin kehopositiivisuuden kriitikoilla kuin siihen suopeasti suhtautuvillakin (”kaikki ihmiset jotka haluais olla äänekkäitä kehopositiivisuudesta”). Nerdinplussize-kanavan aktivisti liittää opastavassa puheenvuorossaan kehopositiivisuuden muihin yhteiskunnallisiin erontekoihin ja niistä juontuviin syrjiviin rakenteisiin, kuten ”rotuun” ja rasismiin. Tämä on suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuuskeskustelussa melko uutta, mutta esimerkiksi Pehmeä-kollektiivi puhuu ruumiillisuuden ja rodun intersektiosta somessa sekä omassa podcastissaan, joka ”asettaa ruskeat lihavat kehot keskiöön” (Ruskeat Tytöt 2018).

SOPUSOINNUN TAVOITTELU

Kolmas diskursiivinen strategia, joka erottautui aineistoa analysoidessa, on sopusoinnun tavoittelu. Toisin kuin konfrontaatiossa ja opastuksessa, sopusoinnun tavoittelussa aktivistit hakevat syvempää molemminpuolista ymmärrystä keskustelun alla olevasta aiheesta. Seuraavassa vastatessaan kriitikon ”Kehopositiivisuus voi sulkea lääkärin suun” -kolumniin (Laukka 2018) aktivisti pyrkii lisääntyneeseen harmoniaan kehopositiivisuuden kriitikoiden kanssa muun muassa korostamalla, että arvostelu sinänsä ei ole epätoivottua, vaan päinvastoin tervetullutta:

– kehopositiivisuutta kuten mitä tahansa muutakin liikettä, ideaa tai toteutusta on hyvä ja tarpeellista kritisoida, en siis ole kritiikkiä vastaan hyökäämässä tässä. (Raippalinna 2018, kirjoitettu blogiteksti)

Yhteisyyden hakeminen on sopusoinnun tavoittelun strategiassa keskeistä. Seuraavassa Onnellinen siili -YouTube-kanavan aktivisti käyttää videonsa kuvaustekstissä passiivia (”on – keskusteltu paljon”) eikä nosta esiin mitään tiettyä tahoja, joka olisi esimerkiksi kyseenalaistanut kehopositiivisuuden tarpeellisuuden. Kuten paikoin opastusstrategiassa, myös tässä aktivistin voi nähdä puhuttelevan niin

kehopositiivisuuden kriitikoita kuin sen kannattajakin (”törmäätte”):

Viime aikoina on mediassa, ja erityisesti sosiaalisessa mediassa, keskusteltu paljon kehopositiivisuudesta ja sen tarpeellisuudesta. Mä olen myös saanut mun videoihin muutamia ei-niin-rakentavia kommentteja liittyen lihavuuteen. Tällä videolla esitän neljä toivetta tai vinkkiä avuksi tilanteeseen, jossa törmäätte mediassa tai somessa lihavuuskeskusteluun. Toivon meille kaikille rakentavia keskusteluita. (Onnellinen siili 2018a, kirjoitettu teksti YouTube-videon kuvauskentässä)

Näen sopusoinnun tavoittelun strategiassa, joka ”pyrkii kohentamaan olemassa olevaa tilannetta” (Rossi 2017, 3). Aineistoanalyysin kehystäminen Sedgwickin korjaavan luennan keinoin hermistää havaitsemaan myönteisiä nyansseja sopusoinnun tavoittelun diskursiivisessa strategiassa. Esimerkiksi yllä olevassa tapauksessa aktivisti toteaa ensin, että hän on saanut kriittisävytteisiä viestejä lihavuudesta, ja sen jälkeen esittää lukijoilleen toimintaehdotuksia, mikäli he joutuisivat samaan tilanteeseen kuin missä aktivisti itse on. Toisin sanoen hän ei antagonisoi ”ei-niin-rakentavien” kommenttien kirjoittajia (mikä olisi ollut tunnusomaista konfrontaatiolle), vaan kääntää asetelman mahdollisuudeksi oppia positiivisävytteisemmäksi keskustelijaksi. Lopuksi hän toivottaa koko YouTube-kanavayhteisölleen konstruktivista vuorovaikutusta – ”meille kaikille” sisältää niin arvostelujen viestien kirjoittajat, kehopositiivisuuden piirissä toimivat kuin aktivistin itsensäkin.

Kuten esimerkiksi Carvalho (2005) sekä Kurz kollegoineen (2005) ovat tahoillaan havainneet ilmasto- ja ympäristöasioista puhumista käsittelevissä tutkimuksissaan, diskursiivisia strategioita voidaan myös yhdistellä. Seuraavassa lainauksessa on selviä sopusoinnun tavoittelun elementtejä – aktivistin tavoite on laajempi perehtyneisyys niin itselleen kuin muille. Samalla näkyy, että hienoista konfrontaatiota käytetään sopusoinnun tavoittelun parina:

Ja mä en muutenkaan ymmärrä tota että ”laihat ihmiset ovat vastustajia”, mä haluaisin nähdä esimerkkejä koska mä en oo törmänny tollaseen.

Haluaisin tietää mistä tää kuva on tullut, koska eihän sen noinkaan todellakaan pitäis mennä. Joten Mungolifen Anna, pliiis laita tohon alle näitä lähteitä mistä nää on, jotta mä ja muut ymmärrettäis paremmin. (Vatsamielenosoitus 2018, artikkelin kirjoittajan litteroima YouTube-video)

Yksi kehopositiivisuutta kohtaan esitetyistä moitteista on, että se syrjii henkilöitä, jotka eivät ole lihavia (Pastak 2018; Takamaa 2018). Ylläolevassa otteessa Vatsamielenosoitus-kanavan aktivisti tähdentää, että kriitikon (Pastak 2018) esiintuoma ”kehopositiivisuus syrjii niitä, jotka eivät ole lihavia” -argumentti ei kuulu kehopositiivisuuden periaatteisiin. Hän tavoittelee sopusointua tekemällä tietäväksi, että jos joku todella on näin viestittänyt, arvostelija on aivan oikeassa puhuessaan tästä ongelmasta: ”eihän sen noinkaan todellakaan pitäis mennä”.

Toisaalta hän mainitsee, ettei ole huomannut kyseistä ilmiötä kehopositiivisuuden piirissä. Sanavalinnoista ”mä haluaisin nähdä esimerkkejä koska mä en oo törmänny tollaseen” ja ”pliiis laita tohon alle näitä lähteitä mistä nää on” käy ilmi se, että hän suhtautuu skeptisesti kyseiseen väitteeseen, joka nojautuu erheelliseen ja/tai vaillinaiseen käsitykseen kehopositiivisuudesta ja on lisäksi esitetty perusteluitta. Kielestä kuultava turhautuminen kriitikon väärinkäsityksiin muistuttaa tunnepitoisuudessaan konfrontaatiostrategiaa.

INTROSPEKTIO

Käsittelen suppeasti vielä neljännen strategian, introspektion, eli sisäisen tutkiskelun. Pidän introspektiota rajatapauksena, sillä alla olevissa lainauksissa aktivistit eivät suoraan viittaa tai vastaa kehopositiivisuuden kritiikkiin. Katkelmista käy kuitenkin ilmi, että kehopositiivisuuteen vihameelisesti tai toisaalta ”oikeaoppisesti” suhtautuminen on ollut näiden pohdintojen käynnistäjänä:

Mä oon Instagramissa pohtinu, miksi kehopositiivisuudesta puhuminen aiheuttaa niin paljon vihakommentteja. -- Mun ajatus on, että ne vihakommentit johtuu pelosta, ja meidän yhteiskunnassa vallalla olevasta läskifobiasta. Itse opettelen jatkuvasti kehopositiivisuutta, ja puhun sen puoles-

ta sekä näillä mun videoilla että Instagramissa, mutta myös mulla on vielä matkaa, jotta pääsisin täysin eroon läskifobiasta. -- Tällä videolla mä ajattelin kertoa kolme esimerkkiä mun omasta läskifobiasta. (Onnellinen siili 2018b, artikkelin kirjoittajan litteroima YouTube-video)

Sedgwickin korjaavaa luentaa soveltaen kysyn, josko tällainen aktivistin henkilökohtainen, avoin läskifobian tutkiskelu toimisi dialogin rakentajana kenties vielä sopusoinnun tavoitteluakin tehokkaammin. Kriitikoiden havaittua, että kehopositiivisuusaktivistitkaan eivät ole immuuneja lihavuuden kammolle – myöntäväthän he sen oma-aloitteisesti –, mahdollinen epätasa-arvoiseksi koettu asetelma voisi murtua. Viitataan esimerkiksi tilanteeseen, jossa arvostelijat saattavat kokea aktivistien olevan ”paremmintietäjiä” (ks. esim. Lamon 2016) ja ikään kuin kulttuurissa vahvasti läsnä olevien kauneus- ja muiden ihanteiden yläpuolella. Tämän on tunnistanut myös Nerdinplussize-kanavan pitäjä:

Mä esimerkiks sain tossa omaankin kehopositiivisuuteeni pienen wake-up callin, ku mä ehkäsyn takia lihoon semmoset viitisentoist kiloo tossa niinku vuoden alussa, nii mä huomasin et mulle tuli kauheet ongelmat sen takia et mullei ollu koskaan ennen ollu kaksoisleukaa. Ja se jotenki, ni mä menin ihan rikki siitä, ja mä olin jotenki tosi vihainen ittelleni siitä että mun pitäis olla tämmönen niinku kehopositiivisuusihminen, mää saarnaan siitä muille ihmisille että mimmosia niinku niitten ajatusmallit pitäis olla, et miten mää kehtaan niinku jotenkin alkaa angstaamaan siitä et mulla on nyt tämmönen yks näkyvä lihavuuden merkki itessäni. (Nerdinplussize 2017, artikkelin kirjoittajan litteroima YouTube-video)

Kehopositiivisuus- ja läskiaktivistien kokemaa ambivalenssia oman ja muiden lihavuuden suhteen on dokumentoitu laajasti (mm. Ayuso 2001; Cooper 2016; 1998; Donaghue & Clemitshaw 2012; Meleo-Erwin 2011). Ylläolevan kaltaiset ”wake-up callit” voivat herkistää aktivisteja asettumaan kriitikoidensa asemaan ja ottamaan heidän kokemusmaailmansa, kuten mahdollisen tai todennäköisen läskifobian, paremmin huomioon. Se vuorostaan mahdollisesti

selkeyttää heidän viestintäänsä ja terävöittää kehoposiitiivisuusliikkeen ydinviestien ilmaisuja.

LOPUKSI

Tämän tutkimuksen lähtöpiste oli huomioni siitä, että tulin mustavalkoisesti olettaneeksi kehoposiitiivisuusaktivistien ja kehoposiitiivisuuden kriitikoiden välisen vuorovaikutuksen olevan pelkkää yksiulotteista kinaamista. Olin kiinnostunut selvittämään mahdollisimman avoimin mielin, oliko tilanne todella sellainen, vai olisiko keskusteluista mahdollista erottaa myös muunlaisia diskursiivisia strategioita. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwickin korjaavan luen- nan periaate tarjosi hedelmällisen lähtöalustan tälle hankkeelle. Se oli teoreettisena positiona merkityksellinen myös analysoidessani aineistoa, sillä se piti minut koko tulkintaprosessin ajan valppaana havaitsemaan yllättäviäkin (vrt. Valovirta 2006) elementtejä kehoposiitiivisuusaktivistien tuottamissa sisällöissä. Tämä monipuolista ja rikastutti analyysiä.

Tutkimuksen tuloksena erottui kolme ”varsinaista” diskursiivista strategiaa. Vastakkainasettelu, konfrontaatio, jonka olin alun perin pannut merkille, oli kanssakäymisessä yhtenä osana läsnä. Sen ohella kehoposiitiivisuusaktivisteilla oli käytössään myös muita strategioita: opastus sekä sopusoinnun tavoittelu. Aktivistien pyrkimyksenä oli paitsi haastaa kriitikoita konfrontaation keinoin, myös opastaa heitä kehoposiitiivisuuden perusasioista sekä etsiä mahdollisuuksia dialogiin ja molemminpuoliseen lisääntyneeseen ymmärrykseen. Edellä mainittujen ”varsinaisten” strategioiden lisäksi aineistosta erottui neljäntenä strategiana introspektio, aktivistien henkilökohtainen pohdinta lihavuudesta ja lihavana olosta. Sen käytöstä kävi ilmi, että suomalaiset kehoposiitiivisuusaktivistit kykenevät ja myös haluavat reflektoida omaa toimintaansa ja ajatteluaan.

Kuten tutkimuksessa aina, aineiston valinta on vaikuttanut ratkaisevalla tavalla saatuihin tuloksiin: jos aineisto olisi ollut toisenlainen, olisivat siitä uutetut diskursiiviset strategiatkin todennäköisesti muodostuneet erilaisiksi. Tähän artikkeliin ei ollut mahdollista sisällyttää kaikkia relevantteja, kutakin diskursiivista strategiaa havainnollistavia otteita aktivistien kanavilta. Lisäksi jotkin katkelmat sijoittuivat kahteen diskurssiin; hyvä esimerkki on

poiminto Vatsamielenosoitus-kanavalta, mistä erottui sopusoinnun tavoittelun lisäksi konfrontaatiota.

Kehoposiitiivisuusaktivistit ovat käyttäneet diskursiivisia strategioita monipuolisesti antaessaan vastineita kehoposiitiivisuuden kriitikoille. Näin tehdessään he ovat muun muassa tulleet hahmotelleeksi ja osittain vakiinnuttaneeksikin suomalaisen, suomenkielisen kehoposiitiivisuuden peruseräiteet – eritoten opastusstrategiaa käyttäen. Vaikka arvostelijoiden tarkoituksena on ollut kyseenalaistaa tämän yhteiskunnallisen liikkeen pätevyys, heidän kritiikkinsä onkin toiminut aktivisteille ponttimena artikuloida kehoposiitiivisuuden kulmakivet. Siispä sen sijaan, että kritiikki olisi onnistunut ratkaisevasti kyseenalaistamaan liikkeen olemassaolon oikeutuksen, arvostelulla on ollut yllättävä, päinvastainen vaikutus: se on itse asiassa väkevöittänyt kehoposiitiivisuutta edelleen.

Eräs kiinnostava jatkotutkimuksen aihe onkin, missä määrin aktivistit ovat tietoisesti hyödyntäneet kehoposiitiivisuuden kritiikkiä seuraajiensa puhuttelussa ja sitouttamisessa. Tässä artikkelissa tutkitut kehoposiitiivisuusaktivistit ovat toisinaan vastanneet saamaansa kritiikkiin myös suoraan arvostelijoidensa kriittisten kannanottojen yhteyteen (esimerkiksi Vatsamielenosoituksen Tytti Sheimikka kommentoi Pastakin [2018] postausta tämän blogiin), mutta näkyvin vastapuhe tapahtuu lopulta heidän omilla kanavillaan. Tuleva tutkimus voisi selvittää, onko ”kriitikoille vastaaminen” tosiasias- sa yksi strategia saada lisää näkyvyyttä kehoposiitiivisuudelle liikkeenä – ja samalla kenties kasvattaa omaa yleisöä.

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HOW DO FINNISH BODY POSITIVITY ACTIVISTS REPLY TO THEIR CRITICS? A DISCURSIVE STRATEGY ANALYSIS

In recent years, body positivity (BP) – a social movement whose aim is that all bodies be free from discrimination – has become widely known in Finland. So far, the Finnish BP movement has centered around fatness; the majority of the activists are fat women. As the movement has gained traction, critical voices have appeared, claiming that BP glorifies fatness, opposes weight loss and discriminates against non-fat people. In this article, I looked at the discursive strategies that Finnish body positive activists use when they respond to this criticism. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reparative reading is utilized to support the analysis; the data includes blog posts and YouTube videos. Four different discursive strategies were discerned: confrontation, instruction, conciliation, and introspection. The varied usage of these strategies has led to a clearer articulation of the basic principles of the Finnish BP movement. Thus, the criticism against BP has helped to further strengthen the movement.



II

RODULLISTETTUJEN NAISTEN LIHAVUUSAKTIVISMI INTERNETISSÄ – HYPERNÄKYVYYS JA HYPERNÄKYMÄTTÖMYYS KEHOPOSITIIVISUUSKESKUSTELUISSA

by

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Rodullistettujen naisten lihavuusaktivismi internetissä

Hypernäkyvyys ja hypernäkömättömyys kehopositiivisuuskeskusteluissa



Anna Puhakka

Sosiaalisten erontekojen risteymäkohtien tarkastelu - intersektionaalisuus - on ollut useilla tieteenaloilla valtavirtaa jo pitkään. Tutkimuksissa on havaittu, että lihavat, rodullistetut naiset kokevat toiseuttamista ja syrjintää yhteiskunnassa. Yksi tapa pyrkiä sanoittamaan tällaisia kokemuksia ovat hypernäkyvyyden ja hypernäkömättömyyden käsitteet, joiden kautta tarkastelen kehopositiivisuusaktivismiin linkittyviä suomenkielisiä digitaalisia sisältöjä.

Suuri yleisö oppi tuntemaan yhdysvaltalaisen Veronica Pome'en maaliskuussa 2019, kun hänet valittiin Sports Illustrated -lehden vuotuisen uimapukunumeron mallifinalisteihin viiden muun kanssa. Pome'en valinta oli huomionarvoinen kahdesta syystä. Ensimmäinen polynesianainen, joka valittiin malliksi Sports Illustratediin: Pome'e on kotoisin Kaliforniasta mutta polynesianalaistaustainen (Loop Samoa 2019). Pome'e päivittikin sosiaalisessa mediassa heti valintansa tultua julki:

Kaikki tietävät, etten ole tyttö sieltä pienimmästä päästä. -- Altavastajana minun on olennaista korostaa sisäistä

kauneutta, koska niin pitkään minusta tuntui että en vastannut yhteiskunnan odotuksia siitä, mikä on kaunista. -- @si_swimsuit'in kärkikuusikkoon pääseminen on mahdollistanut sen, että voin toimia inspiraationa niille tytöille, jotka eivät tunne olevansa riittävän laihoja, nättejä, muodokkaita tai ihonvärittään sopivia. Suurin nautinto elämässä on tehdä juuri se, mihin kaikki sanovat, ettet pysty. (Pome'e 2019)¹

Veronica Pome'e ei siis nostanut päivityksessään esille ainoastaan lihavuutta vaan viittasi siinä myös ihonväriin. Pome'e on yksi niistä pohjoisamerikkalaisista kehopositiivisuus- ja kehoaktivismivaikuttajista, jotka ovat viime vuosina nostaneet keskusteluun sukupuolen, ”rodun” ja lihavuuden risteymän eli intersektion (ks. myös Gay 2016; Nalgona Positivity Pride 2020; Rashatwar 2020; Taylor 2018; Tovar 2018; Unruly Bodies 2018; Williams 2017). Suomessa tämän saman risteymän merkityksellisyttä ovat ehkä selkeimmin painottaneet kehoaktivisti Javiera Marchant Aedo (Marchant Aedo 2020) sekä Caroline Suinnerin ja Meriam Trabelsin muodostama Pehmeekollektiivi (Ruskeat Tytöt 2018). Artikkelini aineisto koostuu heidän tuottamistaan sisällöistä. Minua kiinnostaa näkyvyyden ja näkymättömyyden tematiikka juuri suomalaisessa kontekstissa: nouseeo aihealue aineistossa esiin, ja jos niin käy, minkälaisia teemoja (ks. Koski 2011) tutkimukseen ottamistani blogiteksti- ja podcast-sisällöistä voisi löytää? Lisäksi yritän selvittää, millaisilla tavoilla sukupuoli, ”rotu” ja lihavuus kietoutuvat yhteen suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuusliikkeessä mukana olevien aktivistien teksteissä.

Yhdysvaltalainen Jeannine A. Gailey (2014) on havainnut tutkimuksessaan,

että lihavat pohjoisamerikkalaisnaiset kokevat olevansa yhteiskunnassaan samaan aikaan sekä hypernäkyviä että hypernäkymättömiä. Olen kiinnostunut tutkimaan samaa ilmiötä Suomessa. Itse asiassa Gailey ja Hannele Harjunen (2019) ovat todenneet vertailevassa tutkimuksessaan, että hypernäkyvyys ja -näkymättömyys ovat ilmiöitä, jotka lihavat naiset tunnistavat niin Pohjois-Amerikassa kuin Suomessakin. Kyseisessä tutkimuksessa Harjusen informantit olivat kuitenkin valkoisia suomalaisia (*white ethnic Finns*), joten oma asetelmani eroaa Harjusen tutkimuksesta siinä, että tarkastelen juuri rodullistettujen henkilöiden tuottamia tekstejä.

Gaileyn (2014) ja Samantha Kwanin (2010) tutkimusten, joihin tässä artikkelissa viitataan, kontekstina on tosiaan Pohjois-Amerikka ja eritoten Yhdysvallat. Siellä rodullistettujen henkilöiden osuus on suurempi kuin Suomessa, mikä todennäköisesti vaikuttaa rodullistettujen lihavien naisten näkyvyyteen ja näkymättömyyteen. Voidaan esimerkiksi ajatella, että Suomessa nämä naiset eivät ole koskaan hypernäkymättömiä, koska yhtäältä rodullistamisen ja rasismien (ks. Keskinen, Näre & Tuori 2015; Oikeusministeriö 2016) sekä toisaalta lihavuusfobian intersektiossa he ovat jatkuvan tarkkailun alaisia.

Kehopositiivisuus on yhteiskunnal-

linen liike, jonka tavoitteiden voidaan katsoa olevan kahtalaiset. Yhtäältä se peräänkuuluttaa jokaisen yksilön oikeutta kehorauhaan eli vapauteen elää millaisessa kehossa tahansa ilman kielteistä kommentointia (vrt. Omaheimo & Särmä 2017). Toisaalta se nostaa esiin sitä syrjintää, jolle marginalisoidut kehot altistuvat (ks. esim. Jaakkola 2016; Saarinen 2017). Toisin sanoen kehopositiivisuusliikkeen kulmakivet eivät suinkaan koske vain lihavia. Kuitenkin suuri osa suomalaisesta suomenkielisestä kehopositiivisuusaktivismita on toistaiseksi keskittynyt juuri lihavuuden tematiikkaan. Historian kautta tarkasteltuna tämä on ymmärrettävää – kehopositiivisuuden kun on tulkittu olevan yksi, melko viimeaikainen juonne lihavuus- tai läskiaktivismin kokonaisuudessa (Cooper 2016). Kehopositiivisuusliike rakentaa sille pohjalle, jonka läskiaktivismi muodostaa.²

Lihavuus- tai läskiaktivismia tutkineet Charlotte Cooper ja Samantha Murray (2012, 134, teoksessa Maor 2013, 281) ovat todenneet, että läskiaktivismia (ja lisäksi: kehopositiivisuutta yhtenä läskiaktivismin muotona, ks. Cooper 2016) on syytä dokumentoida ja analysoida, jotta siitä jo olemassa oleva tieto voidaan yhtäältä arkistoida ja toisaalta jalostaa jatkokäyttöön. Artikkelini pyrkii vastaamaan tähän toiveeseen. Lisäk-

si teksti vastaa Cooperin toisaalla esittämään kutsuun tutkia lihavuutta yhteiskuntatieteellisesti myös muualla kuin Yhdysvalloissa (Cooper 2009, 330).

Aiempi tutkimus rodullistetuista lihavista naisista läskieritysen kehoaktiivismin piirissä

Sosiologi Apryl A. Williams (2017, 6) kirjoittaa, että lihavat rodullistetut naiset ovat kaksin verroin toisetutettuja (ks. myös Kwan 2010). Vaikka tutkijat ovat peräänkuuluttaneet erilaisissa intersektioissa olevien kehoaktivistien kokemusten esiin nostamisen tärkeyttä (Donaghue & Clemitshaw 2012), Williams (2017, 5) toteaa, että kehoaktiivisuuden linkittyvä tutkimus, joka paneutuu lihaviin rodullistettuihin naisiin, on valitettavasti – joskaan ei yllyttävästi – sangen rajallista ja että lisätutkimusta tarvitaan. Myöskään akateemisessa lihavuustutkimuksessa sukupuolen ja rodun risteymää ei ole käsitelty riittävästi: esimerkiksi kriittisen lihavuustutkimuksen lippulaivajulkaisu, *Fat Studies*, ei vuoden 2014 intersektionaalisuudelle omistetussa teemanumerossaan käsitellyt lihavuuden ja ”rodun” risteymää johdantoartikkelinsa mainintoja pidemmälle.

Tutkijat ovatkin havainneet kehoaktiivisuuden olevan paitsi suku-

puolittunut myös varsin valkoinen ilmiö. Jessica Cwynar-Horta (2016, 40) viittaa nykyisiin kehoaktiivisuusaktivisteihin, joiden mukaan aikanaan toisen aallon feminismistä ja lihavuusaktivismista versonutta kehoaktiivisuusliikettä edustavatkin nyt perinteisessä mielessä viehättävät, valkoiset ja ei-lihavat naiset, jotka ovat ”positiivisia kehonsa suhteen”. Alexandra Sastre (2014, 935) taas huomauttaa, että vaikka hänen tutkimillaan kehoaktiivisilla sivustoilla on etnistä ja sukupuolten moninaisuutta, suuri osa osallistujista on valkoisia naisia.³

Esimerkiksi Anni Emilia Alentolan (2017) kehoaktiivisuutta käsittelevä opinnäytetyö näyttäisi vahvistavan Sastren havainnon. Alentolan yllirajainen – toisin sanoen ei ainoastaan suomalaisten sisällöntuottajien materiaalista koostuva – aineisto on kerätty kuvanjakopalvelu Instagramista, jossa kehoaktiivisuusmateriaalia jaetaan varsin runsaasti. Otantaperusteena olivat relevantit aihetunnisteet kuten #bodypositive ja #bodypositivity. Aineiston analyysimenetelmänä oli visuaalinen sisällönanalyysi. Kuvia kerätyi yhteensä 381 kappaletta, joista 92 prosenttia esitti naisia; näistä vuorostaan 91 prosentin kohteena oli nimenomaan valkoinen nainen (emt., 28–29). Valkoisuuden dominanssi on havaittu

myös kehonkuvan tutkimuksessa yleisesti (Rice 2007, 160).

Näyttää siltä, että rodullistettuja lihavia naisia kehoaktiivisuudessa ei ole huomioitu tutkimusteemana sen runsaammin Suomessakaan. Ensinnäkin jotkin kehoaktiivisuudesta Suomessa tehdyt työt käyttävät yllirajasta aineistoa (mm. Nervander 2018), eivätkä täten tarkastele suomalaista kehoaktiivisuusliikettä. Tytti Shemeikka (2018, 2) puolestaan painottaa opinnäytetyössään, että ”kehoaktiivisuudessa käännetään valokeila valkoisesta, hoikasta cis-naisen vartalosta laajempaan käsitykseen kehoista”, mutta yleisön reaktioita kehoaktiivisiin YouTube-videoihin tutkineessa opinnäytetyössään hän ei kyseiseen tematiikkaan sen syvemmin pureudu – kaikei siksi, että hän itse (lihava, valkoinen nainen) esiintyy analysoiduissa videoissa. Sonja Kokon (2018) opinnäytetyö taas erittelee lihavuusdiskursseja *Helsingin Sanomien* kehoaktiivisuuteen liittyvissä mielipidekirjoituksissa, joissa ei kuitenkaan tarkastella ”rotua”. En myöskään omassa artikkelisani (Puhakka 2019) tee niin. Vaikka siis tutkimusta ja etenkin opinnäytteitä kehoaktiivisuudesta tehdäänkin, sukupuolen, lihavuuden ja ”rodun” risteymän analyysi ei vielä ole juurikaan nousut suomalaisen tieteen agendalle.

Hieman yleisemmällä tasolla lihavuuden, sukupuolen ja ”rodun” intersektio ei kuitenkaan ole tutkimaton alue. Samantha Kwan (2010) on tutkimuksessaan tarkastellut sitä, miten lihavuus risotteää sukupuolen ja ”rodun” kanssa. Hän soveltaa Peggy McIntoshin (1988) valkoisen etuoikeuden (*white privilege*) käsitettä omaan analyysiinsä siitä, millaiseksi erilaisten kehojen toimijuus muotoutuu arkisissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Tekstissään Kwan (2010) luo käsitteen *thin privilege*: laihan, hoikan tai ei-lihavan etuoikeus (myös suomenkielissä teksteissä käytetään usein tätä englanninkielistä termiä). Afrikkalaista nykydiasporaa käsittelevässä tutkimuksessaan Andrea Shaw (2006) taas esittää, että tänä päivänä musta, lihava naiskeho rikkoo rajoja jo pelkällä olemassaolollaan, siitä huolimatta – tai juuri sen takia –, että kyseisen kehon aiemmat (kielteiset) representaatiot ovat olleet niin voimakkaasti valkoisen hegemonian muovaamia ja siten mustaa kehollisuutta kaventavia.

Hypernäkyvyys ja hypernäköttömyys

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastelen suomalaisessa kehopositiivisuusliikkeessä toimivien rodullistettujen aktivistien omia kokemuksia näkyvyydestä. Kaikilla

heillä on myös omakohtaista kokemusta lihavuudesta. Analysoimani internet-/media-aineisto koostuu Javiera Marchant Aedon kirjoittamasta blogista sekä Pehmeekollektiivin podcast-sarjasta. Käytän teoreettisena apuna Jeannine A. Gaileyn kirjassaan *The Hyper(in)visible Fat Woman* (2014) esiteltäviä näkyvyyden ja näköttömyyden sekä hypernäkövyyden ja -näköttömyyden käsitteitä. Gailey on itse inspiroitunut Monica J. Casperin ja Lisa Jean Mooren (2009) tutkimuksesta, joka koskee näkövyyden politiikkaa ja katsomisen etiikkaa. Casperin ja Mooren tutkimuksen innoitus näköy Gaileyn teoksessa kahtalaisesti. Ensinnäkin hän kiinnittää yhtäältä huomiota nimenomaan ”kateissa oleviin kehoihin” (Gailey 2014, 7). Toisaalta hänen tavoitteenaan on tehdä näköväksi lihaviin naisten kokemaa sosiaalisen syrjintää ja paljastaa itse hypernäkövyyden ja -näköttömyyden ilmiö (emt., 171).

Gaileyn (emt., 11) mukaan etuoikeudet, kuten ei-lihavat, kehot ovat enimmäkseen näköttömiä: niiden jokaista liikettä ei analysoida ja ne saavat paljonkin liikkumavaraa käytöksensä suhteen. Gailey (emt., 8) kirjoittaa edelleen, että hänen analysoimansa näkövyyden ja näköttömyyden ilmiö saa etuliitteen ”hyper” silloin, kun siitä tulee sosiaalisesti alistavaa. Siispä queerit kehot, li-

havat kehot, rodullistetut kehot sekä kehot, jotka ovat muutoin fyysisesti ”erotuvia”, ovat näköviä usein nimenomaan sosiaalisesti alistavalla tavalla: toisin sanoen ne ovat hypernäköviä (emt., 10). Esimerkiksi mediassa uutisoidaan lihavuuden kansanterveydelle ja -taloudelle aiheuttamasta (väitetystä) taakasta ja julkaistaan valokuvia, joissa lihavat kehot on esitetty yleensä kaulasta tai hartioista alaspäin (Cooper 2007). Toisaalta nämä samaiset kehot voivat paradoksaalisesti olla myös hypernäköttömiä muun muassa siten, että niitä ei näkövaikapa populaarikulttuurissa tai mediaviihteessä.

Gailey keskittyy tutkimuksessaan lihaviin naiskehoihin. Hän kuvailee (sukupuolittuneen) lihavuuden paradoksaalisuutta toteamalla, että yhtäältä lihava keho on hypernäkövä, sillä sitä ruoditaan jatkuvasti julkisuudessa ja mediassa esimerkiksi ”lihavuus-epidemiasta” kirjoittamalla (ks. esim. Harjunen & Kyrölä 2007). Toisaalta läski on marginalisoitua ja poispyyhtykin; tässä mielessä lihavat naiskehot ovat hypernäköttömiä (Gailey 2014, 7). Käytännössä tämä voi näköy vaikke vaatekaupassa, jossa lihavat naiset eivät koe tulevaisuutta palvelliiksi vaan ovat ikään kuin ”väärässä paikassa” (Jennings 2010, teoksessa Harjunen 2016).

Gailey (2014, 8) toteaa, että ruumiin

koko on samankaltainen muiden ei-diskursiivisten ilmiöiden (kuten ”rodun”) kanssa siinä mielessä, että se on havaittavissa ennen kuin ensimmäistäkään sanaa on lausuttu – ja henkilöistä tehdään oletuksia perustuen siihen, miten kyseiset sosiaaliset erityispiirteet keskenään risteävät. Gailey (emt., 18–19) siis linkittää näkyvyyden/näkymättömyyden yksilön sosiaaliseen paikantumiseen: hänen näkökulmansa on, että rodullistetut lihavat naiset kohtaavat moniperusteista syrjintää, koska he ovat marginaalissa rotunsa/etnisyytensä, sosiaalisen sukupuolensa ja kehon kokonsa vuoksi (emt., 42). Intersektionaalisen tutkimusotteen painottamisesta huolimatta tutkija itse (emt., 168–169) toteaa, että hänen otoksensa ei ollut niin moninainen kuin hän olisi toivonut. Hän peräänkuuluttaakin lisätutkimusta lihaviin henkilöiden kokemuksista muun muassa ”rodun” ja seksuaalisen identiteetin risteymäkohdissa.

Aineisto ja metodologia

Artikkelini käsittelee internet-aineistoa, jota ovat tuottaneet sellaiset Suomessa toimivat ja ruskeat tai rodullistetut kehopositiivisuusaktivistit, joilla on lihavuudesta henkilökohtaista kokemusta.⁴ Näistä ensimmäinen on Caroline ”Caro” Suinnerin ja Meriam Trabelsin muodos-

taman Pehmee-kollektiivin samannimisen podcastin ensimmäinen tuotantokausi (Ruskeat Tytöt 2018). Kollektiivi toimii osana Ruskeat Tytöt -mediaa. Podcastin tuotantokausi koostuu viidestä jaksosta, joista jokainen on pituudeltaan keskimäärin 30 minuuttia. Ensimmäisessä jaksossa tekijät kertovat itsestään kuulijoille. Suinner identifioi itsensä muun muassa ”ruskeaksi, lihavaksi queer-ihmiseksi, ja panseksuaaliksi” (J1, 02:00).⁵ Lisäksi hän mainitsee kahteen eri otteeseen olevansa lihava, ”koska jos joku ei vielä ymmärtänyt, niin olen lihava” (J1, 02:45). Trabelsi taas kuvailee itseään näin: ”mä oon ruske, ja mä oon lihava, ja nää kaks asiaa on ain määrittänyt tosi vahvasti mun elämää” (J1, 04:28).

Toinen käyttämäni aineistolähde on Javiera Marchant Aedon blogi (Marchant Aedo 2020), josta valitsin analysoitaviksi kaikki ennen 28.3.2019 julkaistut julkiset blogikirjoitukset. Kirjoituksia on yhteensä 48 kappaletta, ja niiden pituudet vaihtelevat sadoista aina tuhansiin sanoihin. Koska tavoitteenani tässä artikkelissa on tutkia näkyvyyden ja näkymättömyyden kokemusten sanallistamista, en ota blogin kuvamateriaalia osaksi analysoitavaa aineistoa. Ollessaan vieraana Pehmee-podcastissa Marchant Aedo kertoo olevansa ”chileläinen, tamperelainen tyyppi – – aktivisti, se on mun ykkösjuttu.” (J4, 02:30). Marchant

Aedo kirjoittaa, että bloginsa alkuaikoina, vuosina 2014–2015, hän oli lihava, mutta sittemmin hänelle tehtiin lihavuusleikkaus (hän itse käyttää termiä ”bariatrinen leikkaus”), minkä myötä hän laihtui. Vaikka Marchant Aedo ei kuvaa itseään tällä hetkellä lihavaksi, on hänellä siitä omakohtaista kokemusta; lihavuus ja lihavana eläminen ovat toistuvia teemoja hänen blogissaan.

Aineiston analyysimenetelmäksi valikoitui dialoginen tematisointi (Koski 2011). Leena Kosken kehittämässä menetelmässä aineistoa tulkitaan samanaikaisesti sen analyysin kanssa (emt., 145). Näiden kanssa vuoropuheluun asetuvat ”teoreettinen ja metodologinen ajattelu, empiirinen aineisto, tutkimuskohteeseen liittyvä tieto, aiempi tutkimus ja tutkijan oma ymmärrys” (emt., 127). Tutkija siis ammentaa tässä ”analyysi-tulkinnassaan” laajasti niin omasta kuin muiden tietämyksestä. Tämä tuntui tärkeältä, koska artikkelin aihetta on toistaiseksi tutkittu niin niukasti.

Dialoginen tematisointi etenee vaiheittain tiettyjen askelten mukaisesti. Ensimmäisessä vaiheessa raakatekstimuodossa oleva aineisto tiivistetään kategorioiksi. Tällöin tutkijan tehtävänä on ”etsiä tekstistä sellaisia lausumia, jotka ovat merkityksellisiä teoreettisen ajattelun ja tutkimuskysymyksen kannalta” (Koski 2011, 136). Juuri näin pyrin me-

nettelemään: pidin hypernäkyvyyden ja -näkyttömyyden käsitteet mielessä heti alusta pitäen. Dialogisen tematisoinnin toisessa vaiheessa analyysitulkinta etenee kategorioista teemoiksi (emt., 138). Tässä vaiheessa tutkija pyrkii kiteyttämään aineistonsa merkittävimmät teemat – yhä valitsemansa teoreettisen viitekehyksen läpi tarkastellen. Näin toimin minäkin: aineisto oli varsin rikasta, ja Gaileyn teoria auttoi tunnistamaan kaikkein havainnollisimmat kohdat tässä esitettäväksi.

Aineiston analyysiä

Ei, ei välttämättä ihmiset pidä sust enemmän [kun sä laihdut kymmenen kiloa]. Ne ehkä vaan kiinnostuu sust enemmän koska sust tulee näkyvämpi. (Ruskeat Tytöt [RT] 2018, J2, 16:30)

Yllä olevasta lainauksesta käy erinomaisesti ilmi, että Pehmeä-kollektiivin Suinner on havainnut saman ilmiön kuin Gailey (2014): ihmiseen kiinnitetään vähemmän huomiota tämän ollessa lihava, koska hän on silloin hypernäkyvä. Laihtuminen vuorostaan tuo henkilölle yhtäältä näkyvyyttä ja toisaalta näkyttömyyttä sopivissa määrin, mutta huomionarvoista on, että ne eivät saa eteensä liitettä ”hyper”. Tämä vertautuu Gaileyn yllä olevaan huomioon siitä, että ei-lihavilla on usein lihavia enemmän

sosiaalista liikkumavaraa normatiivisen kehollisuutensa ansiosta. Suinner tietää, että kyse ei niinkään ole siitä, että muut alkaisivat pitää ihmisestä enemmän tämän laihduttua; sen sijaan he alkavat kiinnostua tästä kohentuneen näkyvyyden ansiosta.

Esittelen seuraavaksi tutkimusaineistosta erottuneista teemoista ne kolme, jotka mielestäni havainnollistavat hypernäkyvyyden ja -näkyttömyyden tematiikkaa parhaiten.⁶ Ensinnäkin aineistosta käy ilmi, että kehopositiivisuusliike on mukana tuottamassa rodullistettujen, lihaviin naisten hypernäkyttömyyttä. Toiseksi kehosyölyttäminen nousee esiin ilmiönä, jossa hypernäkyvyys ja (hyper)näkyttömyys punoutuvat yhteen. Teemoista kolmas on se, että hypernäkyvyyttä on mahdollista ottaa haltuun.

Kehopositiivisuusliike lihaviin ja ruskeiden naiskehojen hypernäkyttömyyden tuottajana

Aiemmin tässä artikkelissa pohdin, onko rodullistettujen lihaviin naisten Suomessa ylipäätään mahdollista olla hypernäkyttömiä, kun he ovat rasismin ja lihavuusfobian risteyskohdasta kumpuavan jatkuvan tarkkailun alaisina. Meriam Trabelsin mukaan hypernäkyttömyyttä vaikuttaisi tapahtu-

van ainakin yhteiskunnallisen keskustelun tasolla:

Jos on vaik rodullistettu ja sit samaan aikaan lihava, ni siit intersektiost en oo nähny niinku mitään keskusteluu. (RT 2018, J1, 12:05)

Myös ulkomaiset kehoaktivistit, jotka sijoittuvat rodullistetuksi tulemisen ja lihavuuden intersektioon, ovat kertoneet tulevansa marginalisoiduiksi paitsi yhteiskunnassa laajemmin, myös kehopositiivisuusliikkeen sisällä, koska se on tilana niin valkoinen (Jennings 2018; Shackelford 2016; Yeboah 2017). Marchant Aedo rinnastaa kehopositiivisuuden ja viime vuosina runsaasti huomiota saaneen #metoo-kampanjan:

Tiesittekö, että kehopositiivisuusliike kuten #metoo on mustien naisten alulepanema liike? – Ettekö tienneet? Se johtuu siitä, että #metoo on valitettavasti omittu palvelemaan ensisijaisesti valkoisia naisia. Samalla tavalla kehopositiivisuus on omittu palvelemaan sopivan lihavia ja valkoisia naisia. Siis sopivan lihavia. Sopivan valkoisia. Sopivan normaaleja. (Marchant Aedo 2018a)

Meriam Trabelsi huomauttaakin, että nykyhetken kehopositiivisuusliike on epäonnistunut tehtävässään nostaa marginalisoituja kehoja keskiöön:

Tää liike tällä hetkellä sulkee ulos just ne kehot, joita sen alunperin piti tehdä näkyväks. Eli tällä hetkellä tuntuu siltä, jos vaikka Instagramia kattoo ja sieltä kattoo vaikka #bodypositivity, niin sieltä tulee tosi paljon valkosii, cis-, heterokehoja, jotka on sillee todella hoikas kunnossa, enemmän ehkä sellasii timmejä jopa, siel näkyy aika vähän todella oikeesti lihavia tai mitään muita marginalisoituja kehoja. (RT 2018, J2, 23:40)

Koska kehopositiivisuus on juuriltaan lihavuusaktivistinen liike, jonka tavoitteena on nostaa esiin yhteiskunnallisessa marginaalissa olevien kokemaa ulkonäkö- ja kokosyrjintä, kuulostavat Trabelsin nimeämät ”valkosii, cis – – todella hoikas kunnossa” nykykehopositiivisuuden määreinä perin surkuhupaisilta. Voitaneen sanoa, että siinä missä Gailey (2014) havaitsi tutkittaviensa joutuvan hypernäkömättömiksi yhteiskunnallisella tasolla, ovat nämä aktivistit lisäksi kokeneet samaa hypernäkömättömyyttä siinä nimenomaisessa liikkeessä, jonka olisi tarkoitus parantaa heidän asemaansa – ja näkövyyttään, kirjaimellisesti ja symbolisesti.

Pehmee-kollektiivin jäsenet painottavatkin sosiaalisen median – varsinkin Instagramin – parissa toimivien, etuoikeutetussa asemassa olevien sisällöntuottajien vastuuta siitä, että he luovat tilaa muille (RT 2018, J1, 17:30; 18:30):

Jos sä oot normikokonen ihminen, tai sä meet siihen yhteiskunnan normiin – – et jos Sä käytät sitä [kehopositiivisuus]hashtagii siel sun Instagramissa jotenki niinku päivittäin, niin sillohan siitä taas jää näkömättömäksi ja jää niinku piiloon ne ihmiset ja ne kehot jotka tätä eniten tarvitsee. (Meriam Trabelsi, RT 2018, J1, 16:50)

Sekä Pehmee että Marchant Aedo nostavat myös itse esiin ruskeita, lihavia naisia omista sisällöissään. Pehmeen podcastissa on esimerkiksi osio, jossa he vinkkaavat kuulijoille kiinnostavista ruskeista, lihavista naisista. Niin ikään Marchant Aedo on jakanut säännöllisesti muiden tuottamia intersektionaalisuus- ja läskiaktivismisisältöjä blogissaan. Joulukuussa 2018 hän teki 12 kirjoituksen sarjan nimeltään *Radikaalin joulukalenterin suosituksia*. Jokaiseen kirjoitukseen sisältyi Seuraa somessa -osio, ja Pehmeen Instagram-tili oli mukana yhdessä niistä.

Kehosyyllyttämisessä kietoutuvat hypernäkövyys ja (hyper)näkömättömyys

Aktivistit siis kokevat ruskeiden ja lihaviin naiskehojen nykyäkövyyden olevan huono – suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa vallitsee Gaileyn termin hypernäkömättömyys – ja heille on erittäin

tärkeää muuttaa tilannetta. Pehmeen kotisivuilla podcastin kuvataan haastavan ”kauneus- ja muita ihanteita, mutta myös (suomalaisen) kehopositiivisuuskeskustelun nykytilaa, joka on edelleen paljolti valkoisuuden ja muiden normien dominoimaa” (Ruskeat Tytöt 2018). Näkömättömyyden ohella eritoimen Marchant Aedo kirjoittaa myös näkömättömyydestä (ks. myös seuraava alaluku):

Teen itsekin työtä sen eteen, että ihan kaikenlaisilla kehoilla on oikeus olla olemassa ja näkyä katukuvassa ja internetissä, koska kehosyyllyttäminen ei ole todellakaan okei. Se on jumalauta väärin. (Marchant Aedo 2016)

Marchant Aedo ei maininne katukuvassa näkömättömyyden sattumalta. Tulkitseen, että hän tunnistaa yhteyden yhtäältä lihaviin (ja muiden marginalisoitujen) kehojen hypernäkövyyden ja toisaalta kehosyyllyttämisestä (*body shaming*) välillä. Jos lihava henkilö vaikkapa kokee, ettei voi oleskella julkisella paikalla hypernäkövyytensä vuoksi (koska voi esimerkiksi joutua pilkan kohteeksi), hän saattaa mieluummin jäädä kotiin päätyen näin muille näkömättömäksi. Toisin sanoen Marchant Aedo osoittaa, miten kehosyyllyttäminen – sekä lisäksi, että myös sen ”pelkkä” aavistelu (ks. esim. Kwan 2010, 153) – voi johtaa tilanteeseen, jossa lihava ihminen alkaa

vältellä tilanteita, joihin olettaa liittyvän hypernäkyvyyttä.

Hypernäkyvyyden teemaan liittyy myös ”tuputtaminen” eli se, että henkilön pelkkä olemassaolo julkisella paikalla tulkitaan oman itsen liialliseksi esiintuomiseksi. Marchant Aedo kirjoittaa ilmiöstä ulkomaalaisuuden näkökulmasta:

Minusta on myös aika mielenkiintoinen se 23 vuoden maassa vietetyn ajan jälkeen yhä useammin kuulemani ja lukemani ajatus ”vieraiden tapojen tuputtamisesta”. Ilmeisesti se, että minä tulen tänne ja asun täällä ja minulla on tapoja, jotka ovat erilaisia suomalaisten vastaavista, on jo itsessään tuputtamista. Koska muutoin en näe merkkejä tunkeutumisesta, pakottamisesta tai tuputtamisesta. (Marchant Aedo 2015)

Tämän artikkelin aineistossa ei suoraan viitattu lihavuuden ”tuputtamiseen”, mutta koska se on varsin tuttua muista yhteyksistä, koen, että asia on perusteltua mainita. Kehopositiivisuutta ja lihaviiden ihmisten näkymistä esimerkiksi sosiaalisessa mediassa on näet pidetty lihavuuden ”tyrkyttämisenä” ja ihannoitina myös Suomessa (mm. Hyväri 2018; Kettunen 2018; Pastak 2018). Kun lihavan kehon pelkkä näkyvillä olo julkisessa tilassa tai internetissä tulkitaan lihavuuden ihannoinniksi ja si-

tä kritisoidaan, tehdään lihavuudesta hypernäkyvää – Gaileyhän määritteli ”hyper”-etuliitteen olevan olennainen silloin, kun näkyvyydestä tulee sosiaalisesti alistavaa.

Hypernäkyvyyden haltuunotto

Kuten lainaukset tutkimusaineistosta osoittavat, suomalaisen kehopositiivisuusliikkeen aktivistit tunnistavat selvästi Gaileyn (2014) tutkimuksessaan nimeämän ilmiön: he puhuvat sangen luontevan tuntuisesti kehojen näkyvyydestä ja -näkyttömyydestä, tosin ilman hyper-etuliitettä. Gaileyn tutkimustaan varten haastatteleminen naisten joukossa oli joitain, jotka kutsuivat itseään läskiaktivisteiksi, mutta he eivät kehystäneet toimintaansa näkyvyyden ja näkyttömyyden käsittein. Suomenkielisessä aineistossa näkyminen sitä vastoin tulee esiin monessakin mielessä:

Aina ennen kun mä meen lavalle – – mä teen sellasen tosi tietosen vaikuttamisratkaisun mun vaatteiden kautta, mä valitsen läpinäkyvät vaatteet tai tiukat vaatteet jotka ei yhtään piilottele sitä miltä mun keho näyttää – – koska mä haluan näyttää sen esimerkin että on ihan OK näyttää tältä. (RT 2018, J5, 20:20)

Näin puhuu Pehmeepodcastissa vieraana ollut Marchant Aedo näkyvyydestä suhteessa yhtäältä työhönsä juontajana ja toisaalta rooliinsa kehoaktivistina. Hän tietää olevansa julkisessa tilassa selvästi esillä ja päättää harkitusti käyttää sitä kehopositiiviseen vaikuttamiseen. Aktivistien tietoista toimijuutta korostaakseni kutsun tätä hypernäkyvyyden haltuunotoksi – Gailey (2014, 152–153) puhuu rajojenlylyksestä ja kumouksellisuudesta.

Ajattelen, että haltuunotossa on kyseessä hypernäkyvyyden muuntaminen neutraalimmaksi, ”pelkäksi” näkyvyydeksi (ilman hyper-etuliitettä). Einnormatiivisen kehon esiintyminen läpinäkyvissä tai tiukoissa vaatteissa on tilanne, jonka Marchant Aedo on tunnistanut potentiaalisesti hypernäkyvyydelle altistavaksi ja sosiaalisesti alistavaksi. Kuitenkin juuri kyseinen tunnistaminen muuttaa tämänkaltaisen (yleensä vain tietynlaisille kehoille varatuksi ajattelun) pukeutumisen vastarintateoksi, joka kenties inspiroi muitakin kyseenalaistamaan käsityksensä ulkonäöstä ja kehoillisuudesta.⁷

Jotkut kehoaktivistit ja tutkijat puhuvat ”läskillä pröystäilystä” (Fat Heffalump 2011; Lee 2014; Saguy & Ward 2011; ks. lisäksi ”kaapista tulemisesta” Gailey 2014, 143; Pausé 2012; Sedgwick & Moon 2001). Pröystäilyllä

tarkoitetaan sitä, että lihaviin ihmisten tulisi pelotta näyttäytyä julkisilla paikoilla, käyttää sellaisia vaatteita kuin haluavat, meikata ja kammata hiuksensa kuten haluavat, syödä ja juoda vapaasti, ja niin edelleen. Käsitän läskillä pröystäilyn vastareaktioksi vaatimuksiin siitä, että kehopositiivisuuden ja lihaviin henkilöiden tulisi pysyä katseilta piilossa, siis näkymättömissä (ks. myös van Amsterdam & van Eck 2019).

Gailey (2014, 143) huomauttaa, että läskillä pröystäily ei aina ole tarkoituksellista, vaan lihavat henkilöt saattavat kokea kiinnittävänsä epätoivottua huomiota tehdessään esimerkiksi edellä lueteltuja normaaleja asioita, jotka olisivat täysin neutraaleja aktiviteetteja silloin, kun toimijoina ovat normatiiviset kehot. Yllä kuvattu Marchant Aedon tapaus kuitenkin kehystyy luontevas-ti pröystäilyn kautta; sanoohan hän sen olleen ”tosi tietonen vaikuttamisratkaisu”. Pröystäily onkin yksi tavoista ottaa hypernäkyvyyttä haltuun. Samankaltaista haltuunoton strategiaa voidaan ajatella käytettävän myös esimerkiksi silloin, kun lihava-sanaa käytetään tietoisesti, vastapuheenomaisesti.

Ruskean ja lihavan kehon hypernäkyvyyden (ja miksei-näkymättömyydenkin) haltuunotto ei kuitenkaan tule aineistossa esiin strategiana, jota käytettäisiin kaikkialla ja kaikissa tilanteis-

sa. Bonita C. Longin ja muiden (2008) käsitteistöä soveltaen aktivistit tuntevat ”luotaavan” kulloistakin näkyvyyttä ja toimivat tekemänsä tilannearvion perusteella. Esimerkiksi terveydenhoitokokemuksista kertoessaan Suinner toi esiin, että oli ollut kaksi viikkoa pois-terveydenhuoltoon liittyvän ryhmänsä tapaamisista ”ihan vaan sen takii kumua ahdistaa asia kuten seistä ihmisten edessä ja ottaa mun paino” (RT 2018, J5, 06:20). Vaikutelmani on, että hypernäkyvyyden haltuunotto, tai edes itsensä potentiaalinen altistaminen hypernäkyvyydelle, olisi ollut tässä tapauksessa liian voimia vievää. Toisaalla samassa jaksossa Suinner puolestaan sanoo:

Mä aattelin et mun pitäis jossain vaiheessa pitää taidenäyttely mun noista ruokapäiväkirjoista. (RT 2018, J5, 04:15)

Tämä toteamus tapahtuu keskellä keskustelua, jonka aiheena on ruokapäiväkirjojen täyttämisen ahdistavuus. Tulkitsen Suinnerin idean hypernäkyvyyden haltuun ottamiseksi kahdestakin syystä. Ensinnäkin ruokapäiväkirjaan merkitään yleensä henkilön nimi ja joskus myös syntymäaika (ks. Eksote 2016). Näiden esillepano taidenäyttelyssä tekisi päiväkirjoja pitäneen henkilön identiteetin, hänen yksityiskohtaisten ruoka- ja juomavalintojensa ohella, nä-

kyväksi jokaiselle kävijälle – ja silti (tai ehkä juuri siksi) Suinner olisi siihen valmis. Tiedostamalla, että häntä voitaisiin esimerkiksi ivata ravitsemusvalintojensa vuoksi, hän ottaakin hypernäkyvyytensä haltuun. Kyseessä on harkittu riski, joka liittyy kehopositiivisuuden sanoman julkituomiseen samalla tavoin kuin Marchant Aedolla yllä olevassa katkelmassa.

Toiseksi näin tehdessään Suinner samalla kääntää huomion itsestään pois-päin. Esittelemällä päiväkirjojaan julkisesti hän voi nimittäin tehdä yleisölle näkyväksi sen, millaista hallintaa lihavaan kehoon kohdistetaan. Ruokapäiväkirjan edustama kontrolli esitetään asiakaalle terveyttä edistävänä toimenpiteenä, sillä terveyden ajatellaan olevan seurausta laihtumisesta. Taidenäyttelyssä lukuisat, rinta rinnan ripustetut ruokapäiväkirjat, joiden merkintöinä ovat niukka-energiset ateriankorvikkeet sekä päivittäinen proteiinikomponentti (RT 2018, J5, 05:55), saattaisivat kuitenkin saada näyttelyvieraan epäilemään, edistetäänkö terveyttä todella näin. Ainakin jos-sain mielessä hypernäkyväksi tulisi tällöin terveydenhoito instituutiona.

Lopuksi

Käsittelin tässä artikkelissa kahta tutkimuskysymystä. Ensimmäinen oli se,

miten suomalaisessa, suomenkielisessä kehopositiivisuusliikkeessä toimivat rodullistetut naiset, joilla on oma-kohtaista kokemusta lihavuudesta, sanallistavat näkyvyyttä(än) internetiin tuottamissaan sisällöissä. Minua kiinnosti (hyper)näkyvyyden ja (hyper)näkymättömyyden tematiikan ilmeneminen nimenomaan suomalaisessa kontekstissa, ja aineistoanalyysini perusteella on helppoa todeta, että nämä käsitteet löysivät kaukupohjaa myös täällä (ks. myös Gailey & Harjunen 2019).

Vaikka aktivistit eivät puhuneetkaan hypernäkyvyydestä ja -näkyttömyydestä, olivat näkyvyyden ja näkö-sällä olemisen teemat vahvasti läsnä heidän tuottamissaan sisällöissä – jopa kirjaimellisesti, sanastotasolla asti. Leena Kosken (2011) dialogista teemoittelua soveltaen erotin aineistosta kolme pääteemaa: kehopositiivisuusliike lihaviin ja ruskeiden naiskehojen hypernäkyttömyyden tuottajana, hypernäkyvyyden ja (hyper)näkymättömyyden yhteenkietoutuminen kehosyölyllistämässä sekä hypernäkyvyyden haltuunotto.

Toinen pohtimani tutkimuskysymys oli se, millaisilla tavoilla sukupuoli, ”rotu” ja lihavuus kietoutuisivat yhteen aktivistien internet-sisällöissä. Tämä seikka osoittautui mutkikkaammaksi. Ensinnäkin aineistossa sukupuoli ei juurikaan kietoutunut liha-

vuuden ja rodun kysymyksiin: aineistossa mainittiin usein sekä lihavuus että ”rotu”, mutta harvemmin sukupuoli. Sukupuolinäkökulman voisi nähdä tulevan esiin siinä, että kaikki sisällöntuottaja-aktivistit ovat naisoletettuja – tosin lähempi tarkastelu osoittaa, että he eivät määrittele itseään naiseksi. Suinner puhuu ”queer-ihmisestä” ja Marchant Aedo ”tyypistä”. Joudun puntaroimaan, olenko – kenties kehopositiivisuusliikkeen eksplisiittisestä ja implisiittisestä naisvaltaisuudesta johtuen – väärin-sukupuolittanut aktivistit.

Toinen pulma jälkimmäisen tutkimuskysymyksen kanssa on, että koin hankalaksi erotella, mikä ominaisuus tai mitkä ominaisuudet tarkalleen vaikuttavat hypernäkyvyyden tai -näkyttömyyden kokemukseen, ja millainen näiden keskinäinen vuorovaikutus oli (ks. Kwan 2010). Toiveeni onkin, että artikkelini toimisi muistuttajana intersektionaalisuuden teoretisoinnin tärkeydestä erityisesti monitieteisessä lihavuustutkimuksessa sekä nettiaktiivisuuden tutkimuksessa. Yhdysvalloissa, missä uimapukumalli Veronica Pome’ekin toimii kehopositiivisuus- ja lihavuus(netti)-aktiivisuuden piirissä, on rodullistettujen henkilöiden osuus suuri, minkä takia aktiivisillakin on siellä pidempi historiansa. Suomessa taas rodullistettujen naisten lihavuus(netti)aktiivisuus on

nuorempaa ja määrällisesti vähäisempää, mutta keskustelun käyminen risteävistä eroista on aivan yhtä tärkeää täälläkin. Kuten Marchant Aedo kirjoittaa:

Kaikenlaiset kehot ovat oikeutettuja samaan kunnioitukseen, kaikilla on oltava vapaus olla olemassa ilman, että tulee pilkatuksi, syyllistetyksi, paheksutuksi ja syrjityksi kehon koon, toimivuuden, terveyden/sairauden, muodon tai ihonvärin takia. (Marchant Aedo 2018b)

Kiitokset

Haluan kiittää kahta anonymiä vertaisarvioijaa oivaltavista ja arvokkaista kommentista artikkelikäsikirjoituksen kehittämisessä. Lisäksi kiitän Sosiologipäivien Ulkonäkö yhteiskunnassa -työryhmän osallistujia 28.3.2019 antoisista keskusteluista.

VIITTEET

1. Suomenkielinen käännös kirjoittajan.
2. Käytän tässä artikkelissa sekä kehopositiivisuuden että läskiaktiivisuuden käsitteitä. Suomen kontekstissa kehopositiivisuus on yleisimmin käytetty, mutta myös läski- ja lihavuusaktiivisi-termejä esiintyy. Perustelen tätä rinnakkaiskäyttöä Charlotte Cooperin (2016) näkemyksellä, että läskiaktiivisuus on varsin moninaista ja kehopositiivisuus yksi sen useista muodoista.
3. Cheryl Thompsonin (2015) mukaan lisäksi yhteiskuntaluokka vaikuttaa Yhdysvalloissa merkittävästi siihen, rakentuuko rodullistettujen naisten paino ”hyväksi” vai ”pahaksi” (ks. myös LeBesco 2004, 58). Katariina Kyrölä (2014, 49) toteaa, että lihavuutta käsiteltäessä luokkakysymykset ovat Yhdysvalloissa vieläkin olennaisempia kuin Suomessa. Luokan merkitys suhteessa lihavuuteen siis on varsin tärkeä myös suomalaisessa kontekstissa (ks. Harjunen 2012), mutta rajautuu tämän artikkelin ulkopuolelle.
4. Pehmeekollektiivi käyttää adjektiivia ruskea/ruskee. Vaikka Marchant Aedo ei puhu itsestään rodullistettuna tai ruskeana, mielestäni ”rodullistettu”-sanan käyttö on perusteltua: se, että hänet rodullistetaan, tulee ilmi lukuisissa esimerkeissä hänen blogissaan. Yksi silmiinpistävimmistä on tapaus, jossa Marchant Aedon tullessa vastaanotolle lääkäri kysyy ensimmäiseksi ”Do you speak Finnish?”, vaikka on lukenut potilaskansion, josta käy ilmi, että asiakas puhuu suomea (Marchant Aedo 2018c).
5. Merkitseen podcast-aineistosta lainatut otteet näin: J1 = podcastin jakso numero 1; 13:00 = se kohta podcastissa, josta litteroitu lainaus löytyy.
6. Aineisto oli runsasta, ja kaikki siitä erottuneet teemat eivät mahtuneet esiteltäviksi tähän artikkeliin. Esimerkiksi terveydenhoitoon liittyviä kokemuksia olisi kiinnostavaa tutkia lisää.
7. Feministinen ajattelija Camille Nurka (2014) on kyseenalaistanut internet-näkyvyyden tavoittelun, sillä verkko on julkinen tila, jossa naisten kehoja pyritään hallitsemaan muun muassa niitä arvottamalla. Nurkan huomio on tärkeä, mutta ei täysin sovellu tämän artikkelin kysymyksenasetteluihin: aktivistit eivät nähdäkseeni tavoittele näkyvyyttä sinänsä, vaan heidän päämääränsä on nimenomaan neutraloida sosiaalisesti alistavaa hypernäkyvyyttä.

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MSc **Anna Puhakka** on jatko-opiskelija Jyväskylän yliopistossa sukupuolentutkimuksen oppiaineessa.



III

**CAN AMBIVALENCE HOLD POTENTIAL FOR FAT
ACTIVISM? AN ANALYSIS OF CONFLICTING DISCOURSES
ON FATNESS IN THE FINNISH COLUMN SERIES *JENNY'S
LIFE CHANGE***

by

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Can ambivalence hold potential for fat activism? An analysis of conflicting discourses on fatness in the Finnish column series *Jenny's Life Change*

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Abstract

In 2017, a publicly funded, nationwide campaign called the Scale Rebellion set out to address fatness through body positivity and fat activism in Finland, with a fat woman named Jenny Lehtinen having a particularly visible role as its figurehead. Some critics of the campaign maintained that Lehtinen's communication lacked focus and was self-contradicting, especially concerning her wish to lose weight. I conducted discourse analysis of a pertinent element of the Scale Rebellion campaign, a 13-part column series called *Jenny's Life Change*, written by Lehtinen herself. The findings suggest that diverse, conflicting discourses on fatness are indeed present in her texts; of these, I have named anti-"obesity," fatphobic, size acceptance, and societal discourses. However, in line with scholars such as Michalinos Zembylas, I argue that Lehtinen's conflicting messaging on fatness is not (only) an expression of her personal opinions but in fact linked to ambivalent fatness discourses circulating in Finnish society and abroad. Further, Samantha Murray has noted that fat activism would do well in welcoming the multivocality often present in (narratives on) fatness, since ambivalence might actually contain potential. One such possibility is the very observation that ambivalence vis-à-vis fatness is not necessarily a sign of being a sell-out or a "fake" fat activist. Instead, it is an indication that at a time when fatness is a stigmatized trait, almost everyone is exposed to conflicting messages about it. Therefore fat activists' ambivalence in relation to fatness should not be judged but rather seen in this larger context.

Keywords

Ambivalence; body positivity; discourse analysis; fat activism; Finland

Introduction

"... fat activism does not have to be coherent in order to be valid." (Cooper 2016, 92)

Like many other countries, Finnish society—the media included—is saturated with one-sided accounts of fat: how it destroys (public) health and how to best get rid of it. A dramatic change came in 2017: The country's public service broadcasting company, Yle, launched a year-long, multichannel (Internet, TV, and radio) body positivity campaign called the Scale Rebellion (*Vaakakapina*), with "Stop Dieting, Start Living" as its slogan. Finns followed journalist Jenny Lehtinen, the campaign's figurehead and a self-proclaimed fat woman, in her quest for a renewed relationship with her body through columns, TV appearances, and intense social media. Two weeks after the Scale Rebellion ended, Yle called it the "people's movement that put an end to crash diets" (Yle 2018).

Not everyone was impressed, however. Critics grew frustrated with the Scale Rebellion because they were unable to figure out its final message: In the end, did it advise the public to lose weight or not (E. Soikkeli, personal communication, March 15, 2018)? In particular, Jenny Lehtinen's ambivalence toward her own fatness was highlighted. The credibility of the campaign was seen to be compromised because its body positive leader ostensibly couldn't make up her mind about whether she herself wanted to be thin or not (Juti 2017). Her columns, written in a personal—and at times emotional—tone, were perceived to reflect these conflicting feelings.

Nevertheless, in this article, I attempt a different reading of this ambivalence. In line with scholars such as Zembylas (2012), I propose that interpreting the *Jenny's Life Change* (*Jennyn elämänmuutos*) columns—part of the Scale Rebellion campaign—that provide the data for this article as if they were solely private musings, and focusing on the columnist as an individual (as some of the critics have done), might not be very productive. Instead, it is more fruitful to examine how her writing might reflect the diverse fatness discourses circulating in contemporary Finnish society (as well as abroad, given the easy access to information produced elsewhere). When the focus is shifted from Lehtinen's conflicting messaging on fatness as an expression of her personal opinions to how the different discourses evoked in the columns are linked to ambivalent discourses moving about in society, it becomes easier to discern how they often conflict each other and are thus more likely to lead to very different understandings of a phenomenon—fatness, in this case.

What is more, Samantha Murray, among others, has suggested that the ambivalence often felt vis-à-vis fat embodiment may contain potential, particularly in the context of fat politics (Murray 2005, 2008, 2010). I offer that one such possibility is the realization that at a time when fatness is a stigmatized trait, ambivalence points to the fact that almost everyone is exposed to conflicting messages about it. This includes those who are supposed to fight against this stigma—such as body positivity and fat activists (Ayuso 2001; Cooper 1998, 2016; Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012; Maor 2013b; McMichael 2010; Meleo-Erwin 2011; Murray 2005, 2008, 2010). Put differently, given the extent of these various discourses, experienced ambiguity toward fatness is not necessarily a sign of being a sell-out or a “fake” fat activist. Therefore, activists' ambivalence toward fatness should not be judged—as some critics of the Scale Rebellion have done—but rather seen in this larger context.

This article is, to my knowledge, the first to examine the Scale Rebellion, as it is very recent. In addition, Finnish fat activism deserves to be documented and analyzed so that the now-existing supply of information on fat activism “can be made known, archived, made into further resources for people to adopt” (Cooper and Murray 2012, 134, in Maor 2013a, 281). Moreover, the present study answers the call to geographically and culturally diversify fat studies (Cooper 2009; see also Maor 2013a). This is important since “fat rights initiatives outside the United States ... at worst, are exoticized, belittled, or unnoticed” (Cooper 2009, 330).

Fat activism, ambivalence, and discourse

The starting point of this study is that fat activism is a valid form of resilience in the face of fat oppression. Fat activism has been characterized as “a social movement concerned with fatness that has many sites and interests” (Cooper 2016, 2). But because the Scale Rebellion calls itself “the biggest *body positivity* revolution in Finland” (Scale Rebellion n.d.; emphasis mine) on its home page, I want to address why I deem it appropriate to consider the campaign as expressly fat activism. It seems to me that this choice of vocabulary has been made at least partly because “as a concept,” “body positivity” is more familiar to Finns than “fat activism”—in other words, the former sounds more palatable than the latter. This doesn’t mean, however, that the Scale Rebellion is not fat activism.

In her book, *Fat Activism*, Charlotte Cooper argues that “fat activism covers a range of interventions and ... many different activities can be thought of as activism” (Cooper 2016, 93). She points out that as many other forms of activism, fat activism, too, can even be contradictory, in opposition to what has traditionally been thought. Further, Cooper calls some forms of fat activism “ambiguous” and asserts that they emerge when produced “by people who are ‘failed’ or ‘less-than-ideal’ fat activists” (Cooper 2016, 88).

Interestingly, it is precisely ambiguous fat activism that is characterized by puzzlement over the fact that “its context, execution and effects [are] not very straightforward” (Cooper 2016, 85). Moreover, Cooper describes this type of activism thus: “[It] can be provocative and it upsets notions of propriety, purpose and progression in activism” (Cooper 2016, 87). This echoes the Finnish public’s mixed reactions concerning the Scale Rebellion: The campaign has stirred up lively discussions, online and off. Accordingly then, that the Scale Rebellion perhaps does not follow long-established ways of doing activism does not mean it is not activism—it just may be characterized by ambivalence.

Although admittedly an everyday occurrence (Preckel et al. 2015), ambivalence is rarely perceived as a strength; ambivalence regarding fatness specifically has often been portrayed as a negative phenomenon. When one grows up in a culture that clearly favors a particular body type above all others, those not fitting in will at times feel conflicted about their different embodiment, no matter how immersed in activism (Pausé 2017). In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted where fatness and ambivalence have featured prominently (Gruys 2012; Hardin 2015; Kyrölä and Harjunen 2017; White 2014). Still others have discussed ambivalence particularly in the context of fat activism or fat politics—concepts I will use interchangeably (Cooper 1998; Donaghue and Clemitshaw 2012; LeBesco 2004; Maor 2013a; McMichael 2010; Meleo-Erwin 2011, 2012). It appears that ambivalence in relation to fatness is far from a rare occurrence. Nevertheless, not many of these contributions make allusion to the *potential* of ambivalence in fat activism.

In her 2005 article, “(Un/Be)Coming Out? Rethinking Fat Politics,” Samantha Murray’s focus is on fat politics and its (assumed; cf. Cooper 2016, 14–18) demand for “a fat subject with a stable and

unitary 'resisting' consciousness ... that univocally rejects dominant views of fat and is able to fully accept her or his body" (Maor 2013a, 281). Coming from a phenomenological stance, Murray points to the ever-changing nature of the human experience and the impossibility of capturing it in a single still frame. She urges us to acknowledge the constant, internal tug of war a fat woman is faced with: On one hand, there is the call for loving one's body unconditionally, and on the other, the negative discourses that cannot *not* influence the way that body is perceived and experienced.

Murray argues that we "cannot experience our bodies in singular, unambiguous ways. This reality, then, needs to be accommodated in ways where ambivalence does not have to be a kind of guilty secret, but is productive in terms of opening out multiple ways of being" (Murray 2008, 144). Maya Maor (2013b) has subsequently reemphasized the potential for resistance and change that fatness's ambivalence carries, as has Owen (2015). In Samantha Murray's words: "If 'coming out' as fat refuses an ambiguous identity, then it refuses *the possibilities ambiguity presents*" (Murray 2005, 62; emphasis mine).

Zembylas's work (2012) on ambivalent discourses is of interest here. Zembylas interviewed Greek-Cypriot children and youth, concentrating on the descriptions of their feelings about migrants in Cyprus. He found not only that these portrayals were complex and conflicted but, even more importantly, that the interviewees' "emotions [were] linked to ambivalent discourses," themselves framed in the societal level (Zembylas 2012, 195).

Zembylas underscores that the main point of his article is not whether his study participants' perceptions were negative or positive. Instead, his study's contribution is that "overall these participants have perceptions of migrants that are fed by ambivalent emotion discourses" (Zembylas 2012, 205). One of the possibilities ambivalence presents for fat activism, then, resides in the fact that once we realize that ambiguity is not an individual-level phenomenon (at least, not solely)—for instance, Jenny Lehtinen's columns are *not* about one woman who is unable to make up her mind about dieting—the door is opened for us to turn our gaze toward the wider circumstance of discourse.

According to a seminal work on discourse analysis, rather than defining it as a "research method with clear-cut boundaries, it is more meaningful to think of discourse analysis as *a loose theoretical framework*" (Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen 1993, 17; emphasis in original). This useful approach has helped me not only to discern between different discourses but also to analyze them in more depth.

The Finnish context

The negative attributes attached to fat persons, familiar from other parts of the world—lazy, dirty, stupid, and ugly (Rissanen and Mustajoki 2006, 120)—prevail in Finland as well (Mustajoki 2018). Fat people are discriminated against in employment (Härkönen and Räsänen 2008; Kauppinen and Anttila 2005) and social life (Rissanen and Mustajoki 2006), among others.

Consequently, antifat attitudes have found their way into several cultural products. Among the most prominent are international weight-loss TV formats such as *The Biggest Loser*, as well as their domestic counterparts, like *Honey, You've Become Chubby* (*Rakas, sinusta on tullut pullukka*, aired in 2013–2016) and *Jutta's Six-Month Superdiets* (*Jutta ja puolen vuoden superdieetit*, aired in 2013–2015). Many magazines boast a regular weight-loss section, and the Internet is full of diverse service providers, coaches, nutritionists, and personal trainers aiming to help Finns become thin. Not surprisingly in this overall context, in 2016, only 16 percent of women and 22 percent of men in Finland were happy with their weight (Yle 2017).

Finally, when discussing different discourses circulating in Finnish society, it is important to look beyond those produced in Finnish and Swedish, the official languages of the country. For instance, ten years ago, 82 percent of Finnish adults aged 18–64 said they knew English at least somewhat (Statistics Finland 2008). This enables the acquisition of information from other linguistic regions, such as the anglophone United States, Great Britain, and Australia, where alarmist discourses about fatness have been active for a long period of time—as has counter speech (see, e.g., Cooper 2010). Further, this information acquisition is greatly facilitated by an almost unconstrained access to the Internet (Statistics Finland 2017). In other words, Finns' access to different discourses is high.

Overview of the case study and methodology

As noted, the Scale Rebellion was a year-long multichannel media campaign taking place in 2017. Its central themes were summarized in the *Scale Rebellion Manifesto*: stop dieting; find love and acceptance for the body; improve the way fatness is approached in the health-care system; bring forth bodies of all sizes in the media, without expressing outrage; and make exercise and health-care services genuinely accessible for everyone (Yle 2018).

The Finnish Broadcasting Company, Yle, who produced the Scale Rebellion, is a public service company. As such, it is 99.98 percent owned by the Finnish state—or actually Finns, because a special Yle tax has been in place since 2013 (Yle n.d.). This fact spurred a municipal politician to rhetorically ask whether the campaign's purpose was to rebel against scales or to show strong opposition against “common sense and public health, with the taxpayers' money” instead (Hytinen 2017).

The Scale Rebellion has stirred up other online discussions as well. More often than not, when critique has been presented, it has been aimed at the overall campaign. Instead of focusing on specific components, many contributors have questioned the campaign's *raison d'être*. A participant in a now-archived Reddit thread comments: “Fatlogic keeps on spreading... . America is leading and Finland is not far behind” (Anonymous n.d.), while a local newspaper columnist writes: “The rise in obesity has come to a halt [in Finland], but not because people have gotten happy with their weight and bodies” (Tahvanainen 2017). On the other hand, there are bloggers who support the campaign,

pointing out, for example, that it is promoting human rights (Sieluni silmin 2018) and meant for everyone, no matter the size (YLönen 2017).

A 13-part column series, *Jenny's Life Change*, a pertinent part of the Scale Rebellion, constitutes the data for this article (Lehtinen n.d.). The online series was spread across the year, with a column appearing approximately once a month. The topics match those of the *Scale Rebellion Manifesto*; some monthly themes, such as health care, were discussed in conjunction with other components, such as video clips. The average length of the columns was 607 words, but there was considerable variation: The shortest text contained 342 words, while the longest comprised 1128 words.¹

To analyze the data, I used qualitative content analysis, since it “focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1278). In other words, qualitative content analysis is not (only) concerned with counting occurrences; rather, it aims to probe into the meaning of the words, subsequently grouping them by shared similarities. After particular themes—discourses—started to emerge from the data, I applied purposeful sampling to select the extracts that illustrated the phenomenon under discussion in the most information-rich manner (Palinkas et al. 2015).

This particular group of texts was chosen because they were written by the campaign leader Jenny Lehtinen. I assume that function allowed her the leeway to express herself without limit or restraint. This is valuable, given that this study's purpose is to investigate conflicting discourses in the texts.

Findings and discussion

With discourse analysis as my main interpretative tool, I distinguished four main discourses in the data: anti-“obesity,” fatphobic, size acceptance, and societal.

Anti-“obesity” discourse

To characterize the first thematic set of texts, I am using Deborah Lupton's (2018) term anti-“obesity” discourse. Additional terms often synonymous to it are “obesity discourse” (e.g., Monaghan, Colls, and Evans 2013), and “obesity epidemic discourse” (see Harjunen 2017). I chose Lupton's terminology because firstly and most obviously, “obesity” figures in it, indicating that this discourse sees fatness as “a disease or a precursor to disease” (Lupton 2018, 26). What is more, the prefix *anti-* makes it clear that “obesity” is something to be eradicated.

Being overweight and having body image issues are not a failure due to a person's weaknesses, but caused by a sum of various individual, cultural, and social factors.

And when that's recognized and acknowledged, folks can really get help with their problems. (#2)²

In this section, Jenny Lehtinen does emphasize that “being overweight” does not equal lack of success, clearly aware that this is the prevailing stereotype (Jutel 2005; Puhl et al. 2015; Solovay and Rothblum 2009). At the same time, she can be seen to perpetuate the frequently held assumption that fatness is rooted in individual pathology, such as mental illness (Orbach 1978; for an extensive summary, see Cooper 2010). Moreover, she seems to have adopted the notion, common in medicine and public health, that in the end, fatness is a hurdle: She alludes to “overweight” and body image issues collectively as “problems.” Another excerpt, later in the same column, lends this interpretation of fatness-as-problem further credence:

And does it make sense to tell a person to lose weight if they're healthy but weigh too much? Can we leave them alone as long as relevant indicators, such as blood tests, are OK, even though their BMI wouldn't fit within the ideal? (#2)

Similarly, this excerpt contains manifest elements typical of the anti-“obesity” discourse. First, the wording “weigh too much” betrays the columnist’s view that there *is* such a thing as weighing too much. This echoes Western medicine with its firm emphasis on quantification, measuring, BMI charts, and overall normativization (Lupton 2018). Second, a strong undercurrent of healthism is present when the writer claims that it’s acceptable to be fat “as long as relevant indicators ... are OK.” This viewpoint has been criticized with vehemence. Using the figures of the good fatty and the bad fatty, commentators have pointed out that this logic divides fat people into two camps (Pausé 2015; Rose Water Magazine 2015). The good fatties are those who eat a wholesome diet and exercise regularly. The bad fatties, in turn, are constructed as ignorant sloths who have only themselves to blame if and when they get sick. The neoliberal logic of free will and individual choice further feeds into this rationalization (Harjunen 2017; Lupton 2018).

Fatphobic discourse

While fatphobia is certainly not an unknown phenomenon in Finnish society, it was still surprising to find outright fatphobic discourse in the columns. Although nearly everyone in Finland is at one point or another exposed to the fear of fatness and fat people, it still felt out of place to see fatphobia in the context of an explicitly body positive campaign, created by media professionals, and with nationwide coverage. Nonetheless, I don’t think this translates as Jenny Lehtinen being a particularly fatphobic individual; the juxtaposition of these elements provides a startling example of ambivalence.

Oftentimes, people measure or want to measure my “success” by whether I have lost weight... . It’s also something people speculate on, and sometimes even ask me to my face: does Jenny Lehtinen want to lose weight? I do. I want my weight to become

normalized. In my wildest (and pretty sick) fantasies, often still thumping in the back of my head, I would like to lose half of my body weight. And even if I say that I never ever want to lose weight again, that's a lie as well. I do want to lose weight, every single day, many times. (#11)

The writer is very open about her wanting to diet and her wish to lose a drastic amount of weight. Fat activists and celebrities (as a media person, Jenny Lehtinen is quite a visible figure) are not immune to this kind of ambivalence. *Fat Heffalump* blogger Kath Read, for instance, has written about internalized fatphobia and the responsibility of prominent fat persons to consider the consequences to fat people in general when the former decide to lose weight (Read 2017). She asserts that, in fact, famous ex-fat folks end up reinforcing the existing narratives, in other words strengthening the piece of conventional wisdom that being fat is simply not desirable. Writing about three categories of public figures' positions in relation to their own fatness, Kathleen LeBesco discusses what she calls Traitors. They are those who, when fat, talk openly about feeling good in their bodies and not wanting to change, only to turn to dieting or weight-loss surgery later on, giving an utterly hypocritical impression of themselves (LeBesco 2004, 92–97).

Still, after all [the fat activism], I caught myself recently passing on fatphobia to my child. When they asked me ... if I thought they were fat, I was quick to reply: "Oh no, of course not! Goodness! Absolutely not!" ... I realized that the way I handled my child's question contained a hidden message: It would be just awful if you were fat. ... And above all, I should understand and accept this idea myself: my body is precious and beloved exactly as it is. (#6)

It is obvious that the columnist is aware of, first, that the ubiquitous fatphobic discourse exists, and second, that she has been affected by it—otherwise it would be impossible to pass on fatphobia to her own child. Charlotte Cooper has noted that despite all their work against fat bias, fat activists sometimes “still end up back at square one, blaming [their] bodies for [their] oppression and feeling overwhelmed by [their] fatness” (Cooper 1998, 57–58).

Size acceptance discourse

A third discourse distinguishable from the columns is what I have termed size acceptance discourse. It comes close to body positivity (notably, a form of fat activism itself; Cooper 2016) in that unconditional love for one's body is an integral part of it:

You can and are allowed to love your body, no matter what it's like. The only thing the kilograms can define about you is what the body weighs. (#2)

Body positive fat activist Marilyn Wann, for example, has exhorted her readers to “Ask yourself, what has body anxiety done for me lately? Nothing good, right? So why not get rid of it??? ... You just have to change your attitude” (Wann 1998, 13). Here the possibility of fully accepting one’s body through changing one’s mind (cf. Murray 2005, 2008, 2010) is palpably present. But Jenny Lehtinen expresses caution with regard to this attitudinal transformation:

Many have written [at a related Facebook group] about how difficult it feels to actually genuinely accept oneself. That even if you’re all for the idea, it’s still empty words and repetition without real content. Hey, we’re all in the same boat! This is how it is in the beginning. If certain structures have built up in your mind for years and decades, it takes time to change them. For some, it takes longer, for others, less. I’m one of the former. (#8)

This quote demonstrates that the columnist is cognizant of the ambivalent discourses that make it difficult to adhere to body positive fat activists’ calls for unconditional self-acceptance. In an interview, Hannele Harjunen has remarked that the point of departure for size acceptance in general, and for the Scale Rebellion in particular, is problematic in that the responsibility for change is bestowed upon the individual (Laapotti 2017, 19). According to Charlotte Cooper, size acceptance has “a resigned feel to it” (Cooper 2008, n. p.); fat liberation ideas have been diluted when introduced to mainstream culture and becoming connected to the fashion and beauty industries, in turn producing “a more tentative approach to fat” (Cooper 2008, n.p.).

Societal discourse

I have chosen to name this discourse “societal” because instead of focusing on the individual, as body positivity discourse can be seen to do (cf. Omaheimo and Särmä 2017), societal discourse takes a bird’s eye view, looking at “human beings thought of as a group and viewed as members of a community” (“Society” n.d.):

The Scale Rebellion is about people ... questioning the status quo as regards what kind of a body is good enough, and might [their bodies] be like that. And really find the best way for them to live... . A good life is dependent on so many factors, certainly not on body size only. (#11)

Lehtinen urges her readers to challenge the current situation and societal norms, and this is not the first time. In 2016, before starting the Scale Rebellion, Jenny Lehtinen was a reporter in another Yle television show, *Marja Hintikka Live*. A regular segment of the program was *Jenny and the FatMythBusters* (alluding to the popular TV series *MythBusters*), whose themes were similar to the Scale Rebellion. Possibly the most significant outcome of the *FatMythBusters* was its Facebook group which continues to be active to this day. In June 2018, it had 31,720 members (of all sizes), and there are several posts every day: link shares, photos, and personal stories. Conceivably

propelled by this success, the Scale Rebellion was launched, and it is evident that Lehtinen's columns do speak to many of the anxieties voiced in the FatMythBusters Facebook group:

I want to give people back the right to their own bodies: You are not ugly. Not worthless. You are not a walking health risk. You are a human being with the right to define your body exactly the way you want to. You are allowed to be healthy, beautiful, athletic, hard working, sexy, whatever you want. You also have the right to be treated with dignity everywhere, no matter what you weigh. (#2)

Although Lehtinen's writing style is very vocal, she is not the first media personality to publicly interrogate fat oppression in Finland. One of the first avenues to confront antifat attitudes was the blog *More to Love*. It was active during 2009–2013 and wanted to “represent all the big and beautiful ladies in Finland” (More to Love n.d.). Discussion on Finnish intersectional fat activism is said to have properly begun only in 2016 (Omaheimo and Särmä 2017). It is from then on that activists have started to openly question widespread antifat bias in the form of numerous blogs (such as Vatsamielenosoitus n.d.), Internet sites (e.g., Merimaa and Stolt n.d.), and a theater monologue “Fatso” (“Läski”; Omaheimo and Kilkku 2016).

It is noteworthy that multiple—even seemingly contradicting—discourses are emergent within a single column at times. One example is article #2, where anti-“obesity,” size acceptance, and societal discourses are all present. Another instance is article #11, which contains elements of both fatphobic and societal discourses. This demonstrates that instead of Jenny Lehtinen merely referencing the disagreeing opinions on fatness in the society, she is holding inconsistent and even contradictory beliefs and feelings about fatness herself. Furthermore, there is considerable interaction between the discourses. While they have been presented here as distinct for reasons of clarity, in reality, they are simultaneously intertwined.

Conclusions

The Scale Rebellion was an extensive campaign with a broad coverage; as such, it took the public discussion on fatness to a new level in Finland. In many ways, the campaign came to equal the outspoken Jenny Lehtinen. But although the texts analyzed are written by a particular individual, this study's point is not to draw attention on Lehtinen specifically. Neither is my intention to label the discourses discernible in the columns simply “good” or “bad.” Instead, inspired by Zembylas's work, it seems that a more productive approach could be looking at how the different discourses evoked in the analyzed texts are linked to ambivalent discourses circulating in contemporary Finnish society and elsewhere (Zembylas 2012, 195; see also Murray 2010).

According to my analysis, fatness is a phenomenon that, in the *Jenny's Life Change* columns at least, is currently discussed through discourses that I have named anti-“obesity,” fatphobic, size acceptance, and societal. As a columnist, Jenny Lehtinen has had access to and been influenced by

all of these different discourses—among many others, undoubtedly. They have shaped how she, in turn, is presenting fatness in her own work.

This is why it is problematic to interpret Lehtinen's writing as a mere reflection of her personal inability to make up her mind about being fat. Ignoring the role of discourses and calling fat activists—as Jenny Lehtinen was by a critic—“a silly fat woman' who once again lets herself be fooled by the system and tricked to obey the norms” (Juti 2017) can compromise the budding clout fat activism now has in Finnish society. Focusing on “silly” individuals discredits the aims of fat activism and obfuscates the power it could potentially have as a social movement. Furthermore, when the ambivalence expressed by fat activists is labelled as “silliness” in this way, the activists themselves may choose not to communicate their contradictory thoughts and feelings about fatness. This omission and the ensuing silence can, in turn, become mentally burdensome.

It is important to normalize the experience of ambivalence for two reasons: first, in order to prevent fat activists who experience ambivalence from being silenced as “hypocrites” by others; and second, in order to keep fat activists from self-silencing out of fear of being judged hypocritical. Instead of being trapped in ambivalence, centering it as a normal and expected consequence of living in a culture that hates and fears fatness can shore up ambivalence as a powerful place from which to continue the fight to advance the rights and interests of fat people.

Notes

1. Unfortunately, I was not able to access exact data on column readership; however, the columns have been actively shared on Facebook—barring one, hundreds of times, and on occasion, thousands.

2. The numbers refer to the columns, which I have numbered in chronological order. The original language of the texts is Finnish; I have translated the excerpts.

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IV

SOFIE'S WORLD: RESISTANCE TOWARD THE THIN IDEAL IN SOFIE HAGEN'S FAT ACTIVIST ONLINE CONTENT

by

Anna Puhakka, 2021

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Chapter 8

Sofie's World: Resistance toward the Thin Ideal in Sofie Hagen's Fat Activist Online Content

Anna Puhakka

Introduction

One of the core elements of the Western beauty ideal is the thinness norm. The normative body – a body that is not fat – is associated with normality and desirability (Brewis, 2017, p. 5), whereas the norm-breaking fat body presents its polar opposite. In this way, norms regulate, to a large extent (although specific contexts, or fields, always do have a role to play), which bodies possess aesthetic capital, itself exchangeable for other forms of capital. In today's day and age, a thin body equals aesthetic capital and thus potential for upward mobility or socioeconomic advantage, while a fat body equals the opposite – the reversal of existing opportunities (Brewis, 2017, p. 6; Puhl & Brownell, 2001). Therefore, aesthetic capital is a useful way to conceptualize the power that norms hold.

Fat activism, with its 50+ years of history, has risen as a response to discrimination against fat people. With the advent of the World Wide Web and, more recently, social media, this movement for social justice, 'always growing and refining itself' (Cooper, 2008), has spread throughout the Internet environment. In response, I explore stand-up comedian Sofie Hagen's fat activist online content in this chapter. I am interested in how social media activism can be used as an avenue, first, to deconstruct norms related to physical appearance and, second, to show appreciation and recognition for bodies that do not confirm to those norms. I ask: In which ways does Sofie Hagen challenge appearance-based norms via her online fat activism?

Three distinct themes arise out of Hagen's public timeline photo captions on her Facebook business page, which I analyse qualitatively with the help of dialogic thematic analysis (Koski, 2020): offensive resistance, doing fatness wrong

Appearance as Capital, 135–148



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and ambivalence. Further, an additional motif, encompassing the other themes, presents itself – namely, non-communication, or Hagen’s perceived reluctance to engage in dialogue on social media. I argue that, taken together, these four elements institute a strategy through which Hagen is able to break the prevailing physical appearance norm that thinner is always better.¹

My impression is that Sofie Hagen’s intended audience is comprised mainly of two separate groups: those already sympathetic to the fat activist cause and those critical of it. These groups do not necessarily follow any particular demographics, although the majority of body positivity advocates, for instance, tend to be young (and white) cis females. That women in particular would be drawn to these thematics is corroborated by research showing that gender plays a central role in how body size is experienced and interpreted: Expectations vis-à-vis embodiment differ among genders, as do their consequences, which tend to be more negative for women than for men (Gailey, 2014; Harjunen, 2009).

This chapter is structured as follows. I first discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the study and then introduce the text’s central concepts and some methodological considerations. Next, I lay out an analysis of the study’s data before presenting the conclusions and suggestions for further research.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Appearance Norms, Fat Stigma, Fatphobia and the Good Fatty

To understand weight discrimination and fatphobia, it is imperative to be cognisant of the prevailing appearance-related norms that give rise to these phenomena. In this study, the focus is on norms related to size and weight of the body in particular. The overall parameters of what constitutes a ‘normal’ or acceptable body are narrow indeed: one must not be too thin, muscular, short or tall. The most prevailing appearance norm in the Western world today, however, dictates that the body – especially the female one (e.g. Harjunen, 2020) – must, first and foremost, not be fat.

This norm is upheld by many core societal institutions, such as school, science (particularly medicine) and the media (Harjunen, 2009). It is maintained and perpetuated through diverse practices and discourses; one example of such a norm-sustaining discourse is that of the obesity epidemic (Harjunen, 2020). Here, fat people are seen to pose a threat to the advancement of the society, including the economy and even the environment. With these types of discourses circulating widely, it is not surprising that fatness is a heavily stigmatised trait, labelling fat people with such qualities as lazy, dirty and even immoral (Brewis, 2017, p. 2; Jutel, 2005; Pausé, 2017).

Fat stigma, in turn, leads to weight discrimination and fatphobia (e.g. Farrell, 2011). I interpret weight discrimination and fatphobia as sanctions for breaking social norms; they can be seen as penalties for exceeding the body weight or size generally deemed ‘normal’ and acceptable. As a term, ‘weight discrimination’ includes all those who are marginalised because, for one reason or another, they do not fit in the ‘normal’ category – in addition to fat bodies, ‘underweight’ bodies

may face weight discrimination. 'Fatphobia', for its part, denotes the widespread fat-hating and fat-fearing culture as well as its concrete ramifications, to which fat people are subjected every day (Harjunen & Kyrölä, 2007, pp. 305–307).

The consequences of fatphobia include negative attitudes, mistreatment, lack of services and outright discrimination (Harjunen, 2020). Studies show that fatness is socially sanctioned in many life areas of central importance, such as education (Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009), working life (Härkönen & Räsänen, 2008; Kauppinen & Anttila, 2005) and healthcare (Puhl & Heuer, 2011; Sabin et al., 2012). In addition, weight discrimination has adverse consequences for fat people's physical and mental health, along with an increased mortality risk (Schvey et al., 2014; Sutin et al., 2015).

One attempt to manage fat stigma is to become a so-called good fatty, or 'the fatty that people will tolerate' (Stryker, 2016; see also: Chastain, 2014). A good fatty actively aspires to become not fat or at least subscribes to the idea that thinner is better (Bias, 2014). Deliberately trying to distance oneself from a fat identity and framing fatness as unwanted can be called 'doing fatness right'; such actions might include losing weight on purpose and/or weight loss talk (Harjunen et al., 2007, p. 288) as well as displaying healthy eating and daily exercise (Southard Ospina, 2017).

Adopting a good fatty's behaviours and ways of speaking might alleviate the stigma for the individual engaging in these practices, but it does not question the underlying fatphobic culture (Chastain, 2016). Instead of managing fat stigma, fat activism's *raison d'être* is to challenge it and, ultimately, break appearance-based norms. To remind the reader of the confrontational nature of (Hagen's) fat activism, I call it 'oppositional' (see Pausé, 2015a, p. 2) on occasion.

Studying Sofie Hagen's Online Fat Activism

As a general starting point, I take activism to mean concrete actions with an established end goal. The ultimate objective of fat activism is to end the marginalisation of fat people, and to reach that target involves 'many sites and interests' (Cooper, 2016, p. 2). In this chapter, I define online fat activism as intentional activity intended to inform and influence others in matters related to fatness, in the soci(et)al sphere in particular, and carried out via digital content on the Internet.

Sofie Hagen is a stand-up comedian, activist, podcaster and author (Hagen, 2019). She is a Dane based in the United Kingdom who writes and performs in English. Hagen is active on several social media platforms – as of April 2020, she had 48,348 followers on Facebook. As an activist, she has been vocal about issues related to discrimination against fat people; one such instance was criticising Cancer Research UK's advertising as fat shaming (e.g. Therrien, 2018). In addition to fatness, she discusses other human-rights-related questions, such as class, race and gender (she describes herself as non-binary; I refer to Hagen as 'she', since she has indicated that her preferred pronoun usage is 'she/he/they' [11 July 2020], thus indicating that pronouns are unimportant to her).²

Although Sofie Hagen has a larger audience and perhaps more activity on Instagram and Twitter, I opted for Facebook as a data source for this chapter because all of her posts are preserved there, making it a more reliable text repository than the two other social media sites. I selected data from among the 537 timeline photos on Hagen's Facebook business page with the criterion that photo captions be written in English. Such captions began appearing consistently in early 2015, with the last one included in this chapter posted on 24 April 2020. Since the focus is on captions, I comment on pictures only where appropriate.

There is no need to be logged in to Facebook to access Sofie Hagen's posts. I interpret this to be a conscious choice to allow as many individuals as possible to access her content. In addition to fat activism, Hagen writes regularly on several other themes, such as social anxiety, politics and numerous lighter topics – nevertheless, in accordance with my research task, the analysis is limited to her fat-activism-related writings.

Categories of Analysis

To analyse the data, I used [Leena Koski's \(2020\)](#) dialogic thematic analysis. The method is comprised of three stages; in this work, they were implemented as follows. First, I acquainted myself with theories related to aesthetic capital, which helped to form the preliminary research question. This theoretical framework then served as the point of departure from which I studied the entire data set. Second, after having read through the data, and keeping the theoretical framework and research question in mind, I formulated some initial content categories (not yet themes per se) – the so-called thick excerpts ([Koski, 2020](#), p. 163) found in the captions were particularly useful here. Finally, I proceeded from categories to proper themes, again, by a constant dialogue between theory and data (hence the method's name).

With dialogic thematic analysis as my interpretative tool, I distinguished four main themes in the data: non-communication with the audience, offensive resistance, doing fatness wrong and ambivalence. Non-communication was the only category of analysis not supported by a prior theoretical backbone; it arose entirely from the data set. In the future, and potentially drawing on a grounded-theory-inspired approach, it would be interesting to apply this theme to activism research more generally. Unfortunately, due to space constraints, I am not able to develop this viewpoint further here.

Another lens through which I analyse Sofie Hagen's activism is that of offensive resistance. According to [Caitlin Cawley \(2015, p. 2\)](#), offensive resistance is first and foremost a rhetorical strategy; in other words, her definition emphasizes the central role of language. For that reason, I will employ offensive resistance as a heuristic aid to distil meaning from the data, especially in terms of the language used in Hagen's activist content. In addition, still following [Cawley's \(2015, p. 4\)](#) lead, I understand the word 'offensive' both as an adjective and a noun. When used as an adjective – as in 'offensive resistance' – it is synonymous to aggressive and obnoxious, among others ([Merriam-Webster, n.d.a.](#)). The noun form of 'offensive', on the other hand, signifies attack ([Merriam-Webster, n.d.a.](#)).

A third theme found in Sofie Hagen's oppositional online fat activism is what [Cat Pausé \(2015b\)](#) has called 'doing fatness wrong'. In fact, for Pausé, doing fatness wrong has to do primarily with rejecting neoliberalism ([Pausé, 2015b](#)). This is certainly one part of Hagen's activism, since on many occasions, she criticises capitalism vehemently – as well as diet culture as one of its many guises. However, Hagen 'does fatness wrong' in numerous ways, and not all of them are necessarily tied to this neoliberal ideal; for instance, non-communication is a non-neoliberal way to do fatness wrong (cf. previous subsection).

For this reason, I will also be using the concept of 'flaunting'. This term comes originally from Kenji Yoshino (2006, in [Saguy & Ward, 2011](#), p. 57), who sees flaunting as the non-acceptance to hide, which has the consequence of drawing attention to a visible stigma – in this case, fatness. By using the notions 'flaunting' and 'doing fatness wrong' interchangeably, I want to emphasise that whereas the theme of offensive resistance is chiefly tied to language use, this theme concerns itself with behaviours. Often, flaunting one's fat entails engaging in activities that are considered entirely neutral for non-fat bodies, but off limits for fat ones. Indeed, Jeannine A. Gailey (2014, p. 143) has noted that

...the fat woman who wears tight clothing [is] perceived as flaunting because [she is] marginalized ... From the perspective of the flaunters, they are simply engaging in behaviors that those who are socially unobtrusive engage in all the time without criticism.

Such behaviours include eating something deemed 'bad' in public, wearing a bikini and getting up on stage to perform ([Read, 2011](#)).

The fourth category of analysis is that of ambivalence. Ambivalence – or simultaneous and contradictory attitudes or feelings ([Merriam-Webster, n.d.b.](#)) – in fat activism has been discussed by many in academia ([Cooper, 2016](#); [Maor, 2013](#); [McMichael, 2010](#); [Meleo-Erwin, 2011](#); [Murray, 2010, 2008, 2005](#)). The consensus seems to be that in societies infused with fatphobia, it is very difficult to accept (one's) fat embodiment at all times. Thankfully, this need not be the case for oppositional fat activism to continue to function; resistance can coexist simultaneously with more socially conforming thoughts ([Maor, 2012](#), p. 19).

Sofie's World: Features of Sofie Hagen's Oppositional Fat Activism

Non-communication with the Audience

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Sofie Hagen's interaction with her Facebook followers is very limited. Hagen openly admits to not seeing all the messages she receives (11 March 2018), and not responding to comments (4 June 2017). This strategy does not adhere to the commonly held assumption that one

should display reciprocal behaviour on social media platforms. Indeed, Hagen deliberately chooses non-communication:

I'm not reading comments because I'm too busy being beautiful and awesome to read sad man-boys weeping.

(1 October 2017)

Fat activists are frequently exposed to online hate speech (Cooper, 2018; Kinzel, 2016; Read, 2013, 2018), including fatphobic antagonism (Bolden, 2018). I would therefore suggest that the unwillingness to engage in reciprocal communication points to Hagen wanting to protect herself from being silenced (the reference to 'sad man-boys weeping'). In other words, by maintaining non-communication on Facebook, Hagen 'negotiate[s] the risk of interference from perceived outsiders' (Bolden, n.d.). According to my interpretation, this allows her to continue her fat activist role while reaching an ample number of people via the largest social networking site in the world.

At the same time, Sofie Hagen acknowledges that she receives contact from those members of the audience who are sympathetic to her cause:

I don't see everything you guys message or email me, so I rarely answer, but I truly appreciate that you reach out.

(11 March 2018)

This passage, then, suggests that Hagen values contact from her audience but is not often able to reply – one of the reasons being that she does not read the messages, anticipating that many contain hate speech (cf. the preceding quote). Indeed, as indicated, to continue producing thought-provoking content without self-censorship, activists such as Hagen may avoid reading the messages and comments they receive. Consequently, they have less opportunity to communicate with those who could be open or curious about the fat activist cause. This can have a stifling effect on fat activism in the long run, particularly because a significant part of it happens online. What is more, prospective fat activists might be repelled from the movement upon learning of the frequency of receiving online hate.

Offensive Resistance

Of the forms Sofie Hagen's oppositional fat activism takes, offensive resistance is perhaps the one that would be most intuitively associated with opposition. As mentioned above, I employ offensive resistance as an aid for analysis, notably in terms of language use; I interpret content that includes swearing and/or insults as offensive. The following excerpt serves as an example:

This is a big day. I am on the front cover of Politiken with one of my best friends and idols, Andrea Storgaard Brok, because of our

newly started movement, FedFront – an obesity-glorifying and anti-capitalist movement. We are trying to create a network for fat people. And we are trying to kick social structure in the dick. Front page, motherfucker. Front page.

(7 February 2017)

Some of Sofie Hagen's fat-activist messaging is directed towards marginalising societal structures, as in the passage above. Her text not only celebrates the visibility of her non-normative body on the cover of Denmark's biggest paid newspaper (also related to the next theme, doing fatness wrong); in addition, it vigorously opposes structures that promote capitalism and discrimination on the basis of body size. According to media scholars, the virtual space becomes more competitive by the day, and provocation is seen to be more effective than moderation in growing one's follower base (Maasilta, 2012, p. 51) – Hagen's colourful language use could be suggestive of this phenomenon.

In addition to criticising society at large, at other times, Hagen's communication is aimed at those harbouring negative opinions about fat people:

The post I made a few days ago has naturally meant that a lot of people have commented with either extreme ignorance (dieting advice or pretending to be concerned about my health – in which case, go fuck yourself) or with vile and abusive comments.

(26 September 2017)

According to my analysis, a significant part of the captions I categorised as offensive resistance directly address a simultaneously singular and collective 'you'. Here, the previous emphasis on abstract societal elements is switched to individuals. This shift makes it transparent that in the end, prejudices are always held and acted upon by human beings.

Offensive resistance and non-communication with the audience can be seen to intersect in three ways. First, by not responding to comments and messages and thus not 'playing by the rules', i.e. that social media usage should be based on interaction, Sofie Hagen breaks the social media platforms' rules, which in itself can be interpreted as offensive. Second, by not responding and by being offensive, Hagen violates the gender norm that females should be courteous and considerate of others. Third, she breaks the norm dictating that fat folks must act in an obedient manner, almost to the point of rendering themselves invisible. Interestingly, the demands of the two latter norms converge quite a bit.

Doing Fatness Wrong

Earlier in the chapter, I outlined some characteristics of 'doing fatness right', such as living a healthy lifestyle. I then turned to its opposite – doing fatness wrong – and its sub-category, flaunting, which include actions like eating and drinking without restraint. This exact activity is present in the excerpt below, which, moreover, contains a hallmark element of offensive resistance: swearing.

I have decided to just fucking eat and drink and love myself. I'm not going to eat kale and be a miserable prick so that I can live even longer and eat even more kale. Kale begets kale. So nah, fuck that. I know it bothers you that I am fat and I have no shame about it. ... #KaleBegetsKale (22 March 2018).

Of particular interest here is the 'mock' hashtag #KaleBegetsKale, used as an ironic counterpoint (Weller, 2011, p. 70). In addition to the caption above, which discusses neither eating nor being fat as shameful, several of the photos picture Sofie Hagen eating in public (either in restaurants or at home settings with other people; Zdrodowski, 1996). As Saguy and Ward (2011, p. 70) stated,

...when fat-identified women affirm their difference, whether in a bikini or in a restaurant, [they are often doing it] ... to challenge social norms in order to gain social inclusion.

Speaking of bikinis, another way that Sofie Hagen does fatness wrong – or flaunts her fat – is by donning a swimsuit in public and writing about it. Here, Hagen's refusal to cover (to apply Yoshino's definition of flaunting) happens both literally and metaphorically. Not only does the swimsuit expose her bare skin, but by posting about the photo shoot, with a picture included, she also renounces the societal preference for fat folks to remain invisible and not stand out:

Oh hi, this is a photo of me taken from a swimsuit photo shoot in Dubai for a women's magazine. Objectively speaking, I look fucking hot as shit.

(26 September 2017)

In addition, Sofie Hagen exposes her stomach in more than a dozen photos. To underline that she is comfortable in her own skin, a sympathetic face is often drawn on her midsection. Such a picture is also the cover photo of her book (although not in all language versions – something worthwhile to explore in itself). I interpret Hagen flaunting her fat body as a conscious choice to break the norms and to question the prevailing beauty standards, all while pointing out how they have been thoroughly fabricated and upheld by the current system.

While Sofie Hagen's fat body does not constitute aesthetic capital in the society at large in this day and age – quite the contrary – it is important to note that it might in some smaller circles. If the general societal ethos revolves around dieting, exercise and weight loss attempts, those norms are not accepted in Hagen's 'world'. Suddenly, fatness and the exposure thereof, so abhorred elsewhere, become the 'currency' through which one can express independent critical thinking, heightened awareness of social justice issues and empowerment (cf. Åberg, 2019). Ergo, although a body's size might not accommodate mainstream norms, physical appearance is still being used to make a statement about oneself.³

Ambivalence

I have discussed how Sofie Hagen challenges appearance-based norms through her activism. Up to now, and besides the theme of non-communication, I have analysed this opposition through the concepts of offensive resistance and doing fatness wrong/flaunting, which both rest on a solid fat identity. In order for these strategies to be carried out successfully, there can be no 'wavering' in (one's) fat corporeality and the messaging about it: if oppositional activism is to be efficient, the fat identity needs to be wholly endorsed. Still, this does not seem to hold true entirely for Hagen's content. In some captions, albeit admittedly few and far between, she acknowledges the ambivalence she feels towards her body:

I want to say something about this photo. My initial reaction was 'I look big'. And not in a cheerful-hurrah-YAY-I-LOOK-BIG way, but in a 'Why didn't I wear a belt; I look bigger than I am, I could have looked smaller if I had worn something else' [way].

(28 November 2016)

In the following passage, in turn, Sofie Hagen draws the audience's attention to the oft-repeated mistaken idea that the work of a fat activist would and/or should be grounded on them loving their body:

... one of the questions I got asked the most ... was about how OFTEN I loved my body. If I had bad days. And the answer is, yes I am human. Of course I have bad days. But I can honestly not remember the last one. It's been months. I either like my body, or I don't think about it. It's neutral. ... (Not that it's easy to change the way you think and feel. It's taken me 5–6 years. Lots of therapy and unlearning and educating myself. But – the feeling is forever. 95% of diets fail. So you might as well put your eggs in the brain-basket).

(17 January 2020)

Of note here is that Hagen speaks of either 'liking' her body or considering it neutral. Although the original questions are about 'loving' one's body, she does not use that word herself (thus, perhaps, instantiating yet another aspect of non-communication by formulating the answers in a way that she herself sees fit?). She is aware that, to a certain extent, the ambivalence regarding (her) fatness might be a permanent feature in her thinking but also that loving one's body unconditionally is not required to engage in fat activism (see also [Omaheimo & Särämä, 2017](#)). According to Hagen, it is possible for her readers, too, to acquire this sense of body neutrality – by '[putting their] eggs in the brain-basket'.

Unavoidably, what I present above is a limited selection of the central findings; for example, Sofie Hagen's reservations about the body positivity movement would certainly warrant further analysis. As one indication of the data's richness,

multiple themes at times can be found within a single caption; due to space constraints, I have not been able to include the captions in their entirety. Readers are encouraged to seek out the posts in question to get a deeper sense of their context (the attached dates should be of help). In addition, the boundaries between the themes are porous. In this chapter, I have presented the four themes as distinct for clarity, but they do share common traits – for instance, swearing is often present in both offensive resistance and doing fatness wrong, and non-communication intersects with all three.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I set out to enquire about how Sofie Hagen challenges appearance-based norms via her online fat activism. The analysis revealed that Hagen resists the real-life ramifications of aesthetic capital for fat people through four main avenues: non-communication with the audience, offensive resistance, doing fatness wrong and ambivalence.

Non-communication with the audience turned out to be a cross-cutting theme, intersecting with the other three strategies. I interpret this reluctance or unwillingness to engage in reciprocal interaction as being rooted – at least partially – in the fatphobic climate currently rampant in some online fora. In an effort not to expose herself to hate speech, Sofie Hagen ended up inadvertently missing many of the messages meant to encourage her and show support to the movement.

Offensive resistance is first and foremost a linguistic strategy, containing swearing and directed towards oppressive societal structures and prejudiced individuals alike. Doing fatness wrong, in turn, focuses on describing resistant behaviours that affirm the fat body's agency by 'flaunting', i.e. refusing to cover or hide it. Finally, reflecting on ambivalence (conflicting emotions regarding fatness) becomes yet another route by which to challenge body privilege, by showing that activism is possible without a perfectly solid (fat) identity. Taken together, these tactics institute a strategy through which Sofie Hagen can break the prevailing physical appearance norms and question the thinness norm as a widespread form of aesthetic capital.

Of these four elements, some potential paths for especially regarding flaunting now will be proposed for future research. More specifically, academic enquiry would do well to look more closely at the so-called bravery discourse circulating on several social media platforms. The whole idea of flaunting rests on the presumption that when fat bodies do certain things in public, frequently related to eating or dressing – and in so doing often draw negative attention – such actions can be revolutionary because they break the norms regarding what fat folks can or cannot do. Indeed, donning a bikini or eating a hamburger *can* be interpreted as bravery precisely because these behaviours are socially sanctioned, especially for fat women.

However, by emphasising how brave someone is, for e.g. wearing a swimsuit in public (as [Gailey \(2014\)](#) pointed out, flaunting might not be considered as such from the *flaunters'* point of view; on the contrary, they feel they are just engaging

in regular activities that nobody would even notice were their bodies norm-accommodating), not only are the activists reduced to their physicality, with their verbal and/or written messaging overlooked, but the bravery discourse also ends up unintentionally reinforcing the very norms it is intended to challenge. After all, there is nothing brave about looking like the societally preferred norm, whereas the 'So brave!' exclamations serve to underline those instances in which the commented-upon bodies are in some way lacking.

This chapter has shown that Sofie Hagen's activism addresses and questions the thinness norm in a multitude of ways. While fat activists' work is to be applauded, I don't think that ridding the world of fatphobia should be the responsibility of only a few individuals. Because discrimination against fat people is a societal and a cultural phenomenon, it must be tackled on the same level. For example, taking legislative measures to prohibit weight discrimination (see, e.g. Puhl et al., 2015) would be one step in the right direction. Assuredly, fat activism – online and off – is making a dent in the appearance-centredness of society, but allies are needed to eradicate structural injustices.

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Notes

1. Throughout this chapter, I use the term 'fat' instead of 'overweight' or 'obese'. 'Overweight' alludes to a normative idea of excess weight, whereas 'obese' has been used in the medical context – particularly in the West – with a firm emphasis on quantification, measuring and BMI charts (Lupton, 2018). Choosing the word 'fat' over 'obese' and 'overweight' is a way for activists to take it back by deflating the associated derogatory connotations (e.g. Harjunen, 2009, pp. 21–22).
2. The dates indicate the point in time when Sofie Hagen published said post.
3. In fact, one could argue that, as someone who is white, young and able-bodied, being fat is one of the few ways in which Sofie Hagen does not conform. This, in turn, raises a question on the kinds of fat activism that are actually welcomed or acknowledged – especially in the social media sphere. Or conversely: is it possible to do *fat activism* 'wrong'? For instance, will the visually oriented audience on Instagram be able to recognise fat activism if the activists choose to no longer follow the platform-specific, established and aestheticised conventions of (re)presenting fat bodies?

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