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**Marie:**

*[0:10]*

Welcome to Mirror Mirrors podcast on “Body Positivity Versus Body Neutrality.” I'm your host, Marie...

**Mia:**

and I'm Mia.

**Marie:**

First off, I'd like to start off this episode by saying that the two of us are not experts in any way. We are students who were just interested in learning about body image and so we did a little research. And I'd also like to note that some of the content may be triggering for some people... So, Mia, what is body neutrality?

**Mia:**

So, body neutrality is taking a neutral perspective on your body. So, instead of thinking, “I am so beautiful today,” and giving yourself all these affirmations, you take your body as it is. Instead of looking at the beauty side of it, you think, “My hands are so amazing for writing,” and “My legs can take me where I want to go.” It's not about what you look like. It's more about what your body can do for you. Not saying that you can't love your body, but sometimes that's hard. It's impossible to love your body 24/7. Nobody is 110% in love with themselves-- worshipping themselves like a goddess. And that's okay. It's okay just to look at yourself and say, “You know what, I'm not in love with myself today. But I understand my body is a body and my body is innocent,” and then to go about your day.

**Marie:**

It's kind of-- almost a middle ground, I guess, between loving and hating your body, but you're placing more emphasis on achievements rather than appearance?

**Mia:**

No, exactly. And it's not about existing in a place where you feel like you have to push yourself to love yourself all the time. It's existing in a place to just exist and sometimes it's okay to just exist to exist. Lately, with all these trends on social media-- and it's pushed down our throats that we need to be positive about ourselves 24/7 and this can lead into toxic positivity. We are ignoring the bad parts of things. Sometimes you don't feel like loving yourself. Sometimes you don't want to put that makeup on. Sometimes you don't want to dress cute, and that's fine. Exist to exist. Appreciate yourself for who you are and what your body can accomplish, rather than what you look like.

**Marie:**

Something I found interesting about this mention of body neutrality-- I was reading this article that talked about disabilities and how this could be disability-inclusive. So, for people with disabilities, they may fight to love their body sometimes. So, being neutral about their bodies may be less pressure, and like you were mentioning about the toxic positivity, it's not—you're not forcing yourself to be positive about your body all the time.

**Mia:**

And sometimes it can be really draining to be positive about your body 24/7 as well. You shouldn't be standing in the mirror for hours at a time looking to love yourself.

Sometimes it's okay just to accept this is my body. I am not my body. I am just simply a vessel and I have things to do and people to see. Sometimes it's easier just to shroud

yourself in that. I've come to accept my body in a body-neutral way. Of course, there are times when I absolutely do love my body, and I'm a very body-positive-oriented person. And other times it becomes overwhelming, and it becomes too much to love my body some days. And that's fine. You shouldn't have to love your body to be worthy of love and of other people's appreciation. You can just be-- simply be.

**Marie:**

Simply be. I love that.

**Mia:**

So, how does body positivity compared to body neutrality? Because I know when we started this project, we kind of diverted and you were more focused on body positivity, and I went on this body neutrality obsession. So, how would you say that it compares to body neutrality?

**Marie:**

Through my research, I can see where body neutrality-- or sorry, body positivity intended to go. It was supposed to be a movement focused on diversity, empowerment, loving and respecting your body. It intended to reject societal norms and beauty standards and challenge the thin discourse and their message was that all bodies were beautiful. And some even say that body positivity did kind of achieve this, especially in the fashion industry becoming more inclusive. But unfortunately, I feel body positivity has kind of been taken over in a way. It's not so much focused on people of colour, people with disabilities, gender diverse individuals, and those with larger bodies. They're still marginalized and not included in these beauty ideals. I mean, if you look on Instagram-- and I think we kind of talked about this-- you look at the body positivity hashtag and there's still a lot of white, skinny female bodies, or people pushing diet culture under the body positivity hashtag.

**Mia:**

I've also noticed that body positivity has kind of gained traction within capitalism and capitalism has kind of taken a hold of it, as capitalism does. Gotta make money somehow. And they almost sell body positivity back to you. Big, huge celebrities are like, "Oh, we know you love yourself, but you'd love yourself more if you bought this diet, sucker. Oh, you'd love yourself more if you bought this makeup." It's not-- body positivity hasn't been about loving yourself in a very long time, and I think if people really look at it, they'd be able to see it too. But when you bring that up to individuals, they're like, "Oh my goodness. You're against body positivity. How dare you hate other people's bodies?" I'm not saying that. I love all bodies and I think all bodies deserve to be appreciated but I don't think body positivity is doing its job of appreciating those bodies and bringing light to it. I think it's saying that it is. And I think body positivity is now almost making it like you have to ask permission to show your body-- and have to ask permission like, "Is it okay. Am I allowed to love myself?" And body positivity will be like, "Yes, you're allowed to as long as you buy this one thing, and as long as you look exactly like this."

**Marie:**

Exactly, and that's-- when I was doing my research, a lot of people were talking about the harms resulting from the body positivity movement. And that was one of the things that I think we've kind of been getting at is that body positivity-- its goals have been forgotten. And the current movement has actually taken on this idea of before-- from all

bodies are beautiful to what is acceptable fat and what is not acceptable fat, which helps keep those oppressive structures in place and helps keep diet culture and capitalism-- keeps us buying those products to get us to look like the ideal. But it's all wrapped up in this, "Oh, this is how you're going to love your body" kind of idea.

**Mia:**

And you see, that's why I have such a problem with body positivity now, is that when I was in high school-- and this wasn't even that long ago. This was four or five years ago. Body positivity first started taking off and I was like, wow, this is such an amazing movement. I feel so encompassed. But then you look at all these magazines and all these outlets. "Oh, plus-size model," and she's a size 10. "Oh, we're all about diversity," and it's literally just one person of colour within the spread. That's not body positivity. You're just picking and choosing who is acceptable and who's not acceptable under this huge umbrella. It's not-- I don't like it. I don't think it's fair and I think it's almost ignorant, in a sense, to just believe that body positivity is going to fix all of our problems, when it's been taken hold of a lot of people and a lot of companies for capitalistic gain, or just to push their own agenda out.

**Marie:**

And that is kind of the issue with body positivity. It still kind of supports the importance of appearance and it's been taken over by those in privileged social locations, which is kind of what we've been talking about. But what we really need to do to truly be body positive-- if we're going back to the roots of what body positivity was supposed to be, we would need to deconstruct these oppressive discourses like racism, homophobia, colonialism and fatphobia. And I think about Indigenous peoples, specifically, and Indigenous women who have had their body image affected by settler colonialism and sexual violence and heteropatriarchy. But we're not addressing that in the body positivity movement, when that is truly what I think we should be addressing.

**Mia:**

And it's funny to me because, especially within the white liberal feminist lens, you can see people going, "Well, on shaving commercials now, you can see body hair. They talk openly about body hair now," and there are some people who aren't even included in the body positivity conversation. There are some bodies that aren't even out there. There are some bodies who are still hidden and you're going to be talking about body hair like it's this huge leap of faith. No, we have so much other things to deconstruct and put our energy towards. And I'm not saying that Dove commercials aren't an awesome step forward, but there's just so many other things beyond our field of vision that we need to start taking into consideration or we're gonna leave a lot of people behind with these discussions. And that's why I really like body neutrality because it opens the scope. It allows people to come into the conversation and invites them in with a welcoming hand, compared to body positivity where it's like, "Yeah, you're beautiful. But can you please sit in the back row? Yeah, you're beautiful, but you'd be more beautiful if you tried this weight loss supplement." It's not-- body positivity has taken diet culture, skinny privilege, and wrapped it in this fabulous bow and tried to say, "Now you can love yourself." And I don't like that. I think it's toxic. I don't think it's helping the cause. Through this project and through the curious conversations that we've had, I have definitely changed my viewpoint of how I love my body and how I need to start-- not teaching other people how to love their body, but just opening the conversation and

saying, "There are other more healthier ways to love your body." And I think that can be accomplished through body neutrality.

**Marie:**

And you want to know an interesting thing about body positivity and, "Oh, I love my body." There was a study that I was looking at-- and I thought this was so fascinating. It was looking at women who were-- sorry there was two groups. There was a control group, and then the group that they were studying. And there was one group of women that repeated the affirmation, "I love my body," and the control group that was just repeating their age, "I am blank years old." And there were 293 women included in the study, but-- and these findings were really surprising to me at first, but not after we kind of dug into body neutrality and you kind of started describing it to me a little bit more, but those who completed the affirmation actually had lower body satisfaction and a higher number of negative comments to say about their body afterwards. So, it was 53% of the group who had said affirmations wrote negative comments about their body. Whereas the control group, who just said, "I am blank years old," only 6% of them wrote negative comments about their body because they weren't thinking about their body in terms of appearance.

**Mia:**

And that's why I like body neutrality because it doesn't tie back to appearance. We often define people by their body, and therefore, their body is tied into worth, and this self-worth is tied into everything else in our life. We start doubting relationships with people. We start doubting whether we're worthy of that job, whether we're worthy of that raise. And it's all tied into how we view ourselves and how we view our appearance, and that-- it should not be a thing. And I believe that body positivity, although it comes from good intentions, I don't believe that good intentions are good enough anymore. I believe that it should be backed up by action and it should be backed up by positive change. And I think we need to ask ourselves... how do we embody our body? How does this sense of self affect body image? And what can we do to dismantle that?

**Marie:**

We've also learned about a few other ways that we can-- or that some people kind of look at their bodies, or the movements that they follow... So, Mia, I think we both researched a little bit about fat acceptance. Did you want to kind of describe a little bit about what you understand of fat acceptance? Which is another body image movement.

**Mia:**

So, what fat acceptance is-- it was originally part of the body positivity movement. In another podcast, we actually talk about the history of body positivity. Fat acceptance, diverted from body positivity, because they found that they weren't getting the help and support that they needed within the body positivity community. What fat acceptance is, is accepting larger bodies. You are who you are, and you are beautiful for it and your self-worth doesn't come from what size you are. It also really makes you confront... do you have a fat bias? Where does this fat bias come from? And health doesn't equal weight sometimes. And why do we say we love all bodies, but some are more deserving than others? Why? What is acceptable fat and what is not acceptable fat? And how do they tie in together? So, I really found the fat acceptance really confronted my own biases about myself and my body and how I view my own body. And I think it's a very enlightening movement to follow and I think it's one of those movements where you

really need to look inside of yourself and where your biases come from, in order to fully be committed to this movement.

**Marie:**

Definitely, it was kind of interesting learning about this movement because some people were starting to move to this from body positivity, like you were talking about, because body positivity was kind of being overtaken. So, they decided to go back to the roots of fat acceptance and those who subscribe to fat acceptance have created a collective space to fight against structural discrimination and shift the conversation from medicalized to politicized. So, it's no longer fatness doesn't equal health-- that's kind of the idea of this. Fatness does not equal health and all bodies have equal value. And it kind of fights against privilege and the oppression of fat bodies.

**Mia:**

People don't realize that being fatphobic is also a classist issue. Not enough people have access to the same range of foods that you have. And not only that, but some-- a lot of people can't help the way their bodies look and why should they be punished for that? Why should they be discriminated against it for, or oppressed because of it? Or is not everyone allowed to feel some sort of self-worth and self-love, despite what their bodies look like? And that goes on to talk about skinny privilege and when we have the conversation of fat versus skinny. And a lot of people don't like having this conversation, but I think it's a very important conversation to have. Not to say we should be pinning bodies against each other, but there is a certain weight-- different kind of weight that comes with skinny versus fat. And we notice it a lot in how people interact with one another, how people describe one another, and how people are more willing to talk to someone that is skinny, and people who are more willing to engage with them as a person that is skinny. And we talked about this in our other-- we talked about this in our COVID podcast, and we touched on the subject of when someone is called fat versus skinny it means two different things. And I've seen these trends on TikTok, especially when people are complaining, "Oh, my goodness, I got called skinny today, and I'm so offended." And of course, people are going to be insecure about whatever you're insecure about, that is no fault of yours, but to even compare being called skinny to being called fat and being skinny to being fat is just not-- it's not even in the same breath. It's not even in the same scope and I don't think it's fair for people to compare the same thing.

**Marie:**

And one of the community members that we talked to also kind of discussed this with us-- is that skinny shaming is not the same as fat-shaming because it is not at a systemic level. So, that doesn't mean that skinny people can't be insecure about their bodies. Everybody's insecure about their bodies. Everybody struggles with insecurity at some point in their life and that's completely fine. But when you think about the struggles between skinny and fat bodies, you have to remind yourself and remember that skinny shaming is not at the same level because they don't experience discrimination at a systemic level, like those with larger bodies do.

**Mia:**

And, yeah, like you just said it-- everyone is insecure about things. And we're not-- when people are calling others on that, "Oh, it's not the same thing" and they shoot back, "Well, I'm insecure about it." No one said you can't be insecure. As much as it sucks, a

lot of people are insecure about a lot of things or their bodies, but to compare it-- that fat-shaming and skinny shaming are the same thing and on the same level, it's just a sign of privilege, and it's just a sign of ignorance... So, body neutrality, body positivity, what are the pros and cons between these two things?

**Marie:**

I think we've kind of done a good job outlining that throughout the podcast-- about how body positivity is so focused on appearance, which is one of its downfalls. Whereas, body neutrality is focused on achievements, which is one of the positive things about it. This is kind of not really a pros and cons thing, but it's something that I've been thinking about this whole time we've been doing research is that-- my issue with both of these movements, is that we have shifted. And we'll explain this more in our history podcast because I'm so-- this is one of my favourite areas to discuss. We have shifted from fat liberation, which was a collective movement that started in the 1960s which was focused on equality and a fight against discrimination, to almost this individual means of fighting systemic discrimination. So, even though I think both body neutrality and body positivity do have their positive sides, and you can subscribe to whatever movement you feel fits your needs, I still feel like both of these movements are more individualistic when I think we need to collectively stand together as those affected and as allies and focus on collective action aimed at societal or systemic change. That was a lot of societal, discrimination, all those words, but I had-- that's just something I've been thinking about this whole time that we've been having this discussion.

**Mia:**

Well, it's true, though. How are we supposed to create change if we're so focused on our individualistic needs? And I'm not saying you shouldn't be concerned with your own body image and how you can better that with-- through yourself, but the whole point of these movements is to include people in the conversation. It's to uplift them. It's to give them a platform. It's to make their voices heard and if you're just focused on your own needs as a person, how are you helping the bigger cause?

**Marie:**

And I think this was-- this kind of ties into something we also talked about with one of the community members that I really liked-- when they were talking about your own personal body image. They mentioned how advocacy as an approach may actually increase motivation to better your own body image. It can be easier to empower yourself when you are empowering others and challenging fatphobia for others and you're challenging those systems that have some authority. It can be easier to then work on your own body image, which is, I mean-- I was mind blown by that concept because that totally makes sense to me.

**Mia:**

And I do invite everyone who is listening right now to really challenge your own fatphobia and think to yourself, where do my thoughts align? Body positivity? Body neutrality? Fat acceptance? Because whether you agree with it or not, these things do affect you. And how the world engages with your body and around your body does affect you. You need to not only challenge yourself but challenge the people around you. The things that I have been doing lately, through these discussions with community members, between ourselves and our research, I have been challenging body talk with myself and with others. Body talk and the way you view your body really ties into your

self-worth and how you view yourself and how other people view you. I didn't want it anymore. To engage with others, and to challenge yourself and others really does make a difference, and it just starts with you. Even just having a conversation when someone says, "Oh, I'm feeling fat today," you can say, "What does that mean? What does feeling fat mean? What is fat? Where does that come from? Let's have a conversation about it." Advocacy doesn't have to be a huge campaign funded by millions and billions of dollars. Sometimes it can just be one-on-one. Two people having a conversation as people do.

**Marie:**

Something else that I wanted to talk about-- and this kind of goes a little off-topic from what we've been talking about, but it's something that I kind of researched at the end of our project-- was body sovereignty. And I'm just gonna give a basic description of what this concept means, but I feel this is something that all movements need to take into account-- this body sovereignty. But in one article I read, they included this definition to be accurately portraying bodies of Indigenous peoples and people of colour.

Representation, for example, even in the media can hold oppression and colonialism, and we need to understand how we perpetuate or do not perpetuate oppression so we can critically question how these oppressions assign value to bodies. And I've never heard of this concept before, but I think it's-- now that I've learned a little bit about it, I think movements like the body positivity, body neutrality, and fat acceptance movements also need to take this into consideration when they were talking about bodies. We need to critically question body talk and where oppression comes from and how we engage in oppression and how we represent people.

**Mia:**

And I think that's really important is just to be self-aware with any of these movements. With body neutrality, body positivity, or fat acceptance is you need to be self-aware of your social location: where you are, who you interact with, and how you are interacted with. We can't dismantle these oppressive structures with one person. These structures and this body talk has been around for centuries. It can't just be one person fighting the good fight. We all need to band together and have these curious conversations and educate ourselves through these conversations in order to make a difference.

**Marie:**

So, I want to move this conversation on to what do we stand by and why? Mia, do you want to go first?

**Mia:**

I am still very with body neutrality, and that's only because body neutrality has definitely helped me out through COVID and it still has. Will I always stand next to body neutrality? Perhaps, perhaps not. That's the great thing about movements and opinions. They can change and grow, just as you change and grow. What about you?

**Marie:**

I'm going to bring in a little phrase here that I think describes how I feel about all this, and it says quote, "Regardless of whether we focus on this aim of body neutrality or radical self-love (or a combination of the two), it is crucial that we recognize how corporations have perpetuated body discrimination and self-hate in ways that uphold oppressive institutions and policies in society" end quote [quote by Cheryl Frazier and Nadia Medhi, 2021]. I don't know if I fall under any specific category for body movements. I think I see pros and cons to all of them and I think my approach will be

taking those pros and cons from all of them and learning about them. I think I still have a lot to learn. Even though I feel like we've learned a lot, I still feel I have a lot to learn. I think where I stand is that I'm just-- I want to learn the positives from all of them and take that and combine that into my own practice.

**Mia:**

And I think that's definitely the way to go with a lot of things-- is picking and choosing things that you can live by and turning it into something else. A lot of theories and a lot of movements may be outdated and it's time to change them. And it's time to write new movements and new theories... Well, thank you so much for joining us on this Mirror Mirror podcast and this body positivity, body neutrality journey. Sorry that it may have seemed that we were kind of ragging on body positivity, but I promise that we were just being as open and genuine as possible. Please listen to the body positivity history, which we will get into a deeper discussion of what all this means and maybe define a couple more things for you guys. And next time, we won't rag on body positivity so much. We'll try to come in it as neutral as possible. This has been your host, Mia...

**Marie:**

And Marie...

**Mia:**

And thank you so much for joining us today.

*[26:45]*

*[Music]*

\*This transcript is clean verbatim. Unneeded fillers like "um", "like", "you know", "mhmm", and repeated words are omitted. Anything in square brackets was added in to make the transcript clearer\*\*