

Body Positivity Versus Body Neutrality: Mirror Mirror Podcast

I want to talk about body neutrality and what that truly means

- How do I practice it?
- What can I do to practice it better?
- How does it differ from BP?
- It's okay to not always be in love with yourself, sometimes it's okay just to be

I then want to shift the lens to BP.

- How popular it's become
- Where it started, fat liberation
- FAKE BP (Oh you don't look fat. Oh, you're soo skinny)
- How it's become toxic
- What feeds into negative positivity???

Fat acceptance

- Why do we have a fat bias?
- Where does this fat bias come from?
- Health doesn't = weight sometimes
- Why do we say we love all bodies, but some are more deserving than others??
- BP has shifted from loving all bodies to only a small few

Diet culture

- What is diet culture??
- How does that feed into toxic BP and the unhealthy beauty standard?

Male Beauty

- Men are victims of patriarchy beauty standard as well
- FEMALE GAZE VS MALE GAZE, what does that mean
- What does BP mean for men?
- What does BN mean for men?

Feminist viewpoint (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2018)

- How do we embody bodies??
- How does the sense of self affect body image?
- **We define woman by her body, therefore woman's worth is tied into body**
- No body = no self
- How do we understand our own bodies?
- Self-worth is tied into bodies, how we see ourselves and how others see you.

What is body neutrality:

- It is supposed to be a movement focused on the middle ground between loving and hating your body where your body is looked at in terms of function; There is less emphasis on your body's appearance, therefore, giving appearance less power (Cohen et al., 2020; Wincentaylo, 2020).
- The power is placed on your achievements
- Priorities are on how you feel or what you do, not how you look... Lexie and Lindsay Kite say it is the next generation of progress for body image (Kite & Kite, 2020)
- It is debated whether it can be more disability inclusive; those with disabilities may fight to love their body sometimes so being neutral about their bodies may be less pressure, but there are some who disagree with this idea (I would assume it may be due to the part on appreciating the functioning of your body... some with disabilities may struggle with that). I would love to hear more on this debate from people in that community. (Kessel, 2018).
- For compliments, does it hold if you are not talking about the body?
- Sonya Renee Taylor in her book *The Body is Not an Apology* states that body neutrality is like a truce with your body, but she preaches for more... she says you can have more... you can have radical self-love because that is the root of where we started from before we learned body shame (Taylor, 2021).

What is body positivity/issues with the movement?:

- It is supposed to be a diverse, empowering movement focused on loving and respecting your body (Anscomb & Deprez).
- It intended to reject societal norms/beauty standards and challenges the thin discourse (Streeter, 2019).
- Their message is that "all bodies are beautiful"
- Some say that it achieved pushing the fashion industry to be more inclusive (Johansson, 2020).
- Self-compassion, which is intended to be fostered by body positivity, can also be a buffer against negative appearance perceptions (Woodley, 2018).
- But... it still supports the importance of appearance and has been taken over by those in privileged social locations. To truly be body positive you would need to deconstruct oppressive discourses like racism, homophobia, colonialism and fatphobia. Indigenous peoples specifically Indigenous women have their body image affected by settler colonialism, sexual violence and the heteropatriarchy (Graham, 2016; Tinsley, 2019).

- People of colour, people with disabilities, gender diverse individuals, those with larger bodies are still marginalized and still not included in the beauty ideals. Even men are pushed from the conversation. Which is concerning because if we look at social constructionism... Social constructionism says that femininity and masculinity construct our body image. Body size is an aspect of masculine social power, but the construction of masculinity also makes it hard to seek help for eating disorders (Kessel, 2018; Stiman et al., 2009).
- Stephanie Yeboah, a writer, blogger, fat acceptance advocate makes a great point about what the body positivity movement has become when she says quote “It has become a buzzword, it has alienated the very people who created it.” end quote (Wincentaylo, 2020).
- Everyone struggles with body image. As soon as we come to understand what it means to be objectified, we struggle. Yet, systemic discrimination is primarily dealt with by those who are marginalized (Severson, 2019).
- Community member 1 = Skinny shaming is not the same because it is not at a systemic level
- Harms resulting from body positivity movement being taken includes goals being forgotten (we are fighting against oppressive structures felt by those considered to be fat... it should not primarily be an individual struggle to love yourself), the current movement has actually taken on this idea of what is acceptable fat and what is not acceptable fat which helps keep those oppressive structures in place (for example, comments about this person promoting obesity culture, this person is too large to struggle with an eating disorder, etc.), self-love and self-acceptance is seen from a white feminist view only, those who experience multiple forms of oppression are invisible, and the hashtag is being used to capitalize on peoples vulnerabilities (Dalessandro, 2016; Frazier & Mehdi, 2021)
- Community member 1 = Downfalls of body positivity = started to empower fat people, especially fat women of colour... now people trying to convince each other they are not fat
- For privileged people... other movements or words to use could include body neutrality, body confidence, etc. (Luo, 2020).

Studies and their link to body positivity:

- One study looked at 246 Instagram posts to do with body positivity in February of 2019. They captured the first 50 posts over a 7-day period in the body positivity tag. They

found that the majority of the images they looked at contained white individuals, they were mostly female, they were mostly in their 20s, the majority fit Western beauty standards to a degree, and most were in a “normal” range of weight (whatever that means). More than half the posts claiming to promote body positivity did not include diverse body types. Only 38.6% of the posts included features that did not align with Western beauty standards. Also, appearance content seemed common in body positivity posts. However, they did note that body shaming was rare in the sample and the study pointed out in their literature review that it was suggested that viewing photos on Instagram that are unedited may increase body satisfaction and decrease appearance concerns (Lazuka et al., 2020).

- When I looked at the body positivity hashtag I too noticed that quite a few of the posts were from people with privileged social locations (primarily skinny, white females) and there were some advertisements for weight loss
- Another study looked at women repeating the affirmation “I love my body” and a control group repeating their age (“I am (age) years old”). There were 293 women included in the study. Findings were surprising to me at first but not after I dug into body neutrality and the reasoning behind it a bit more... Those who completed the affirmation had lower body satisfaction and higher number of negative comments (53% wrote negative comments) about their body in a writing exercise they completed afterwards than the control group (6% wrote negative comments). This suggests that body positivity/body image affirmations can cause women to think about their appearance and discomforts with their appearance more, actually creating a more negative body image (Engeln & Imundo, 2020).
- Community member 1 = You are going to have good days and bad days with your body like everything else; affirmations can work because you will start to believe it eventually
- These studies show that a focus on appearance may be quite harmful and that the body positivity movement has been taken over

What is fat acceptance:

- Some people are moving to this movement since body positivity has been overtaken; It is a belief that all bodies have equal value; It intends to push the message that fatness does not equal health; It fights against privilege and the oppression of fat bodies (Miller, 2016).

- Those who have created online fat acceptance blog have created a collective space to fight against structural discrimination and shift the conversation from medicalized to politicized (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015).

Body sovereignty:

- Movements need to take into account body sovereignty (sov-ruhn-tee)
- Need to feel safe and in control of the body in terms of health; In one article I read they also include in this definition to be accurately portraying bodies of Indigenous peoples and people of colour; Representation can hold oppression and colonialism; Combination of informed consent and agency over the body; Need to understand how you perpetuate or do not perpetuate oppression so you can critically question how these oppressions assign value to bodies (Gillon [Ngāti Awa], 2019).

My thoughts:

- My issue with both of the movements... we have shifted from fat liberation, which was a collective movement focused on equality and a fight against discrimination, to individual means of fighting systemic discrimination. We need to collectively stand together as those affected and as allies and focus on collective action aimed at societal or systemic change.
- I like this phrase by Cheryl Frazier and Nadia Medhi, who wrote an article on the body positivity movement, 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... and that can be the aim of body neutrality, the aim of body positivity, etc. We need to remember that we are fighting against oppressive structures and not just our individual struggles. These oppressive structures focused on capitalizing on us push these body discourses that cause us to dislike our bodies (Frazier & Mehdi, 2021).
- Need an increase in representation and diverse bodies
- Community member 1 = Advocacy as an approach may increase motivation; it can be easier to empower yourself when you are empowering others and challenging fatphobia for others; challenge systems that have some authority

References

- Afful, A. A., & Ricciardelli, R. (2015). Shaping the online fat acceptance movement: talking about body image and beauty standards. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 24(4), 453–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1028523>
- Anscomb, C. & Deprez E. M. (2021). Introduction. *Debates in Aesthetics*, 16(1), 5–11. <http://debatesinaesthetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/DiA-VOL-16-1-1.pdf#page=13>
- Bothra, S. (2020, October 8). *How the male gaze alters the way we see ourselves*. LiveWire. <https://livewire.thewire.in/personal/how-the-male-gaze-alters-the-way-we-see-ourselves/>
- Chrisler, J. C., & Johnston-Robledo, I. (2018). Woman's embodied self: An introduction. In *Woman's embodied self: Feminist perspectives on identity and image*. (pp. 3–14). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000047-001>
- Cohen, R., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2020). The case for body positivity on social media: Perspectives on current advances and future directions. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 21(7), 1546–1564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105320912450>
- Dalessandro, A. (2016, August 15). 7 ways the body positive community can do better. The Body Is Not an Apology. <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/7-ways-the-body-positive-community-can-do-better/>
- Drummond, M. (2002). Men, body image, and eating disorders. *International Journal of Men's Health*, 1(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jmh.0101.89>
- Engeln, R., & Imundo, M. N. (2020). I (don't) love my body: Counter-intuitive of a body affirming statement on college women's body satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 39(7), 617–639. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2020.39.7.617>
- Frazier, C., & Mehdi, N. (2021). Forgetting fatness: The violent co-optation of the body positivity movement. *Debates in Aesthetics*, 16(1), 13–28. <http://debatesinaesthetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/DiA-VOL-16-1-1-FRAZIERMEHDI.pdf>
- Gillon (Ngāti Awa), A. (2019). Fat Indigenous bodies and body sovereignty: An exploration of representations. *Journal of Sociology*, 56(2), 213–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319893506>
- Graham, N. (2016, July 20). *Changing the conversation around Indigenous body image*. University of Alberta. <https://www.ualberta.ca/kinesiology-sport-recreation/news/2016/july/changing-the-conversation-around-indigenous-body-image.html>

- Harms, J. D. (2020, April 2). *The problem of the male gaze: Berger and body image*. Medium. <https://medium.com/illumination/the-problem-of-the-male-gaze-berger-body-image-dcd8bde2aac>
- Johansson, A. (2020). Fat, black and unapologetic: Body positive activism beyond white, neoliberal rights discourses. In E. Alm, L. Berg, M. Lundahl Hero, A. Johansson, L. Martinsson, D. Mulinari, & C. Wasshede (Eds.), *Pluralistic Struggles in Gender, Sexuality and Coloniality* (pp. 113–146). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47432-4_5
- Kessel, A. (2018, July 23). *The rise of the body neutrality movement: 'If you're fat, you don't have to hate yourself.'* The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jul/23/the-rise-of-the-body-neutrality-movement-if-youre-fat-you-dont-have-to-hate-yourself>
- Kite, L., & Kite, L. (2020). *More Than a Body: Your Body Is an Instrument, Not an Ornament*. HMH Books.
- Lazuka, R. F., Wick, M. R., Keel, P. K., & Harriger, J. A. (2020). Are we there yet? Progress in depicting diverse images of beauty in Instagram's body positivity movement. *Body Image*, 34(1), 85–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.05.001>
- Leboeuf, C. (2019). What is body positivity? The path from shame to pride. *Philosophical Topics*, 47(2), 113–127. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26948109>
- Luo, A. (2020, September 15). *Raffela Mancuso on the body revolution and passing the mic*. The Whorticulturalist. <https://www.thewhorticulturalist.com/read/raffela-mancuso-on-the-body-revolution-amp-passing-the-mic-an-interview-by-anna-luo>
- Mallya M, D. (2020). Reconceptualising female disordered eating and body-image perceptions: A gynocentric trajectory through the new-media. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 12(5), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v12n5.rioc1s12n6>
- Merica, J. (Host). (2021, May 26). Day 115 || Toxic positivity (No. 115) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Make Your Own Damn Bed*. Spotify. https://open.spotify.com/episode/2fo2CVp2LwecSAI2cF6it7?si=AWKxkzVKQ7SIECaTv7MOw&dl_branch=1
- Miller, K. (2016, July 25). *What the fat-acceptance movement is really about*. Refinery29. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2016/07/117556/fat-acceptance-movement-sizeism-explained>
- Park, M. (2020, September 14). *Concept: Body neutrality*. One Woman Project. <https://www.onewomanproject.org/blog/2020/9/9/concept-body-neutrality>

- Preston, A. M. (2021, January 8). *The body positivity community can be toxic too, we just don't talk about it*. BAAZAR. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/health/a35162869/body-positivity-community-and-weight-loss/>
- Raypole, C. (2021, January 20). *How to shift from 'body positivity' to 'body neutrality' — and why you should*. Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/body-neutrality>
- Severson, A. (2019, June 13). *Why I'm trading body positivity for fat acceptance*. Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/fat-acceptance-vs-body-positivity>
- Singh, P. (2020, July 21). *Loving our bodies won't solve body image issues. Here's why*. Feminism In India. <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/07/21/loving-bodies-wont-solve-body-image-issues/>
- Stiman, M., Leavy, P., & Garland, A. (2009). Heterosexual female and male body image and body concept in the context of attraction ideals. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*, 12(1). <http://www.ejhs.org/Volume12/BodyImage.htm>
- Streeter, R. C. (2019). *Are all bodies good bodies?: Redefining femininity through discourses of health, beauty, and gender in body positivity* [Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University]. https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/89894/Streeter_RC_D_2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Taylor, S. R. (2021). *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Tedx Talks. (2019, January 7). *Becoming body neutral | Bethany Meyers | TEDxBethuneStreetWomen* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eU7UJfzDQQ0&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=TEDxTalks
- Tinsley, Q. (2019, January 29). *Who is the body positivity movement leaving behind?* *The Body Is Not an Apology*. <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/who-is-the-body-positivity-movement-leaving-behind/>
- Wincentaylo, C. (2020, June 19). *Body positivity vs body neutrality*. *The Female Lead Society*. <https://www.thefemaleleadsociety.com/body-positivity-vs-body-neutrality>
- Woodley, A. (2018). How does Instagram impact on people's perceptions of their appearance? *Journal of Aesthetic Nursing*, 7(2), 94–95. <https://doi.org/10.12968/joan.2018.7.2.94>