

History of Body Positivity: Mirror Mirror Podcast

- Body P and fat acceptance
- Where is BP rooted?
- ****Give Marie lots of promoting questions****
 - How has the history shaped BP now?
 - How can BP be incorporated in day to day
- How is BP shown on social media?
- How has it helped body image?
- Big companies like DOVE, promoting BP
- ****Moving beyond the scope of BP and changing people's biases of their own body as well as others****
- Perhaps this could go into fat biases??
- What are our own biases?
- Where does social work stand within BP movement
- How can we continue BP?? ****ASK each other****
- How is fat bias rooted in racism?

History timeline:

- There's a lot of stories and pieces that started the movements we know today as body positivity or fat acceptance, some of these stories we will highlight in this episode and some of which we may not know about. If anyone knows more about the history, we would be happy to hear in our feedback and comments section on our website.
- The first ever documented fat activism event to protest against fat bias was brought together by Steve Post, a radio host, in 1967 in the US at Central Park; demonstrators burned diet books and pictures of the supermodel Twiggy and arrived carrying banners reading "Fat Power" and "Take a Fat Girl to Dinner" (Cooper, 2008; Frazier & Mehdi, 2021).
- A few months after the "fat-in" (which is what the fat activism event was called) Lew Louderback published an article titled "More People Should be Fat" in the Saturday Evening Post, a major national magazine; the article discussed the anti-fat bias seen in the workplace and in colleges where people were seen as less qualified and there were wage gaps seen between skinny and fat people; Lew also wrote a book called Fat Power which was published in 1970 which had great ideas around diet and diseases driven by judgemental environments rather than fat but unfortunately missed the mark on feminism, race, and class (BBC, n.d.; Cooper, 2008; Ulmer, 2019).

- Lew's article really hit home with a man named Bill Fabrey, who had a larger wife named Joyce who was being treated unfairly; he was angry about this; a few years after the article was written Bill handed out copies of this article to everyone he knew; eventually he gathered a small group of people and proceeded to create the National Association to Aid Fat Americans in 1969 which is now known as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance to fight against discrimination; began Fat pride movement (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015; BBC, n.d.; Ulmer, 2019)
- Feminists in the US were also angry at the discrimination people were facing and so they created the Fat Underground around this time; it had roots in the radical therapy movement with a couple of the founders being trained as radical therapists; one of the beliefs of radical therapy was the belief that oppression continues to work if it is mystified and demands change of social values; one of the members stated quote "American culture fears fat because it fears powerful women"; Fat Power also inspired some of the members; in 1973 a few members of the Fat Underground, Sara Fishman and Judy Freespirit, released the Fat Manifesto in 1973 which called for equal rights, and called out diet culture (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015; Cooper, 2008; BBC, n.d.; Fishman, 1998; Ulmer, 2019).
- In the 1980s the enthusiasm became widespread for this fat liberation movement and many other movements and groups were formed over the years to combat fatphobia and discrimination including some queer and feminist fat acceptance groups (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015; BBC, n.d.; Ulmer, 2019)
- In 1996, the term body positive became a bit more established; Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott, a psychotherapist and an individual who had struggled with an eating disorder, started a website then called thebodypositive.org, with resources and education (Cherry, 2020).
- In the 2000's to present there seemed to be a move from acceptance of bodies to a change in attitude towards people with larger bodies; celebrities are speaking out, fat studies have shifted the perspective from a bio-medical model to an interdisciplinary approach, social media has picked up the movement, and bloggers have created this fatosphere of fat acceptance (Cooper, 2008)
- It appears across numerous article the general agreed upon year for when the body positivity movement truly emerged was in 2012... body neutrality has differing dates depending on who you read but it came a few years after body positivity

- In my opinion, it started as a response to unequal rights for larger bodies and has transformed into a movement focused on loving oneself and your imperfections or at least learning to coexist with your body

Whitewashing:

- Unfortunately the issue with the take on history that I talked about is very problematic; as an article written by Briana Dominici says, the history has been very “whitewashed”; black activists were not included in founding the national association or the fat underground; in fact, the first black woman to lead the national association was in 2014-2015; her name was Phyllis Warr; so let’s share some of the history, as best we can with the unfortunately limited information we have found on people of colour and the fat liberation/body positivity movements (Dominici, 2020; Osborn, 2021).
- Again, most of this history is from and written about in the US
- Back in the early 1900s (1904-1934) terms were used to put down black fat people; these terms were used in black newspapers that were very well known at the time; terms like lazy, etc. were used; there were also diet ads being put in these black newspapers at the time like diet pills (Dominici, 2020; Purkiss, 2017).
- So, throughout the years body stigma was co-created by people of colour but was also imposed on people of colour (they were dehumanized and hypersexualized) (Dominici, 2020; Purkiss, 2017).
- As Sabrina String, a sociologist who wrote a book called *Fearing the Black Body*, points out quote “[fatphobia] precedes the medical establishment’s concerns about excess weight by nearly 100 years...it’s actually rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Protestantism.”; religion pushed an idea of gluttony so thin became the ideal, and fatness became the opposite. It was seen as a racial and moral impurity (Miller, 2020).
- Sonya Renee Taylor explains that body shame is a white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy tool; body shame is so complicated as its rooted in social, political, and cultural institutions (Taylor, 2021).

History with notable black activists:

- Some notable people who spoke up in later years about fatphobic experiences as a black women included Margaret Bass and Johnnie Tillmon
- Margaret Bass shared her story about experiencing fatphobia while in the segregated South in the 50s and 60s in her essay “On Being a Fat Black Girl in a Fat-Hating Culture”; unfortunately i couldn't find the article to read but you can read it if you buy

Recovering The Black Female Body; she noted in her essay that her weight was more picked at than any other piece of her identity (Dominici, 2020; Purkiss, 2017).

- another strong female activist includes Johnnie Tillmon who in 1972 in Ms. Magazine said “I’m a woman. I’m a black woman. I’m a poor woman. I’m a fat woman. I’m a middle-aged woman. And I’m on welfare. In this country, if you’re any one of those things you count less as a human being. If you’re all those things, you don’t count at all.” (Dominici, 2020; Purkiss, 2017).
- It's thought that at the time around mainstream Fat activism, with the fat underground the national association, the voices of people of colour were shut out because they were stereotyped as more accepting of fat people and therefore did not require activism (BBC, n.d; Ulmer, 2019).
- This is very untrue because as shown above, black female activists were also at the forefront of creating and advocating for fat liberation
- In recent years with the rise of social media, celebrities, and bloggers pushing body acceptance people of colour are not always seen as forerunners to pushing this agenda in the media; that award is often given to women like Tess Holliday or Ashley Graham and not black women like Gabby Sidibe or Stephanie Yeboah or Juicy D. Light who are also loud advocates for fat bodies (Jennings, 2018).
- Juicy D. Light founded Rubenesque Burlesque in 2006 to highlight fat bodies in the burlesque world and the founder of the Fat Flash Mob in 2014 (NAAFA Official, 2020)
- Gabby Sidibe has discussed fat discrimination she faces. For example, she states quote “I don’t happen to have the kind of body that we usually see on television and in films. I am plus-size, I have dark skin and I am 100 percent beautiful, but I get a lot of flak.” end quote (Martin, 2017).
- Stephanie Yeboah has also been open with her struggles stating quote “I didn’t acknowledge the behaviour as an eating disorder, because that was something I assumed only happened to super-slim white women” end quote and quote “But we were also depicted as hypersexual, aggressive, dominant characters, a trope often associated with the pornographic “BBW” (Big Beautiful Women) category, in which black, plus-size women are represented in this way. Seeing these depictions made me feel as if we as black, fat women didn’t have or deserve a space where we could be treated as “normal”, fully-fledged human beings capable of being successful, attractive, desired and mentally sound.” end quote (Yeboah, 2020).

- Tigress Osborn, the current board chair, pointed out that Black women and femmes were not always at the forefront of the formally organized fat acceptance organizations, but they did have an effect at the forefront of organizations like Black Pride, Civil Rights, and Movement for Black Lives (Osborn, 2021).

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