

WHITEOUT AND THE REPRODUCTION OF (FAT) WHITE NORMATIVITY:
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENCE OF WHITENESS IN FAT STUDIES
LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Whiteout and the Reproduction of (Fat) White Normativity:
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This Major Research Paper consists of a critical discourse analysis of the operation of whiteness in the field of fat studies, focusing on how it becomes invisible and consequently manifests in emergent theorizing, especially at its establishment as an academic discipline. Two fat studies readers were selected, one published then and one written more recently, with six chapters selected from each. Using a dialectical-relational approach, these texts were analyzed both individually and intertextually to look at the origin stories of the field, the use of language to obscure whiteness, and the need for critical race/intersectional approaches. Findings show that fat studies has, and predominantly continues to, find itself in a self-imposed state of ‘whiteout’, through which Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people, voices, and experiences are sanitized, marginalized, or erased altogether. To challenge this, fat studies *must* take up whiteness and white supremacy toward its goal of fat liberation for all.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For as long as there have been established and accepted “facts” or “universal truths”, there have been voices who tell stories of the “Other”, of those deemed “uncredible”, of those positioned as the “outsider”. When those stories of this “Otherness” begin to be told, there are opportunities for shifting within discourses, away from that which has been established and accepted, toward something that is more grounded in the experience of the “Others” of which we speak. But when the light shines on the untold stories and experiences without accounting for the diverse ways through which it shines through the prism of “Othering”, it can only be one-dimensional.

For as long as I can remember, I have always been told that “thin is good” and “fat is bad” (Wills, Backett-Milburn, Gregory, & Lawton, 2006, p. 396), and that because my body was the latter, not only was it bad, but I was too. Throughout my academic life (which has been most of my life), I never heard anything about the good that I was doing for my body even though I was larger than the other kids, never felt heard when I tried to talk about the words people used and the comments I would get that I was “too big” or I should “think twice” about seconds, never felt seen while I was shopping for clothes in the “plus size” or “big girls” section. In my personal life, I have been forced to “consume” advertisements for “skinny teas” and “how to kill your fat”, images of women of an “acceptable” size telling me how to get “a body just like theirs” and how to “score the man of my dreams”, media in which the fat girl is the “comedic relief” or the “best friend”. I never knew how to theorize about the things I was experiencing on a daily basis, until I encountered scholarship from the field of fat studies.

Fat studies has attempted to bring a critical view to the current discursive constructions of body weight, size, and appearance while simultaneously promoting equality regardless of one’s relationship to fatness (Rothblum, 2012). As someone who has grown and lived in a body that has always had an intimate relationship with fatness, fat studies spoke to me as if a beacon had shone into the darkness in which my body and the things I felt were not worthy of critical discussion. Mik-Meyer (2010) writes that fat bodies remain highly “under-theorized” or “absent” in the field of social work, even though people in relation with fat may make up a significant part of both our professional and personal lives (p. 386). Fat studies, like other emancipatory projects such as Mad Studies and Disability Studies, seeks to make this “absent presence” (Mik-Meyer, 2010, p. 386) known and provide stories grounded in lived experience

that go outside of what is said to be “true” about fatness. When I looked into the work in the field, I found research that spoke to the very things I was wrestling with: analyses of the media that we “consume” in its many forms, laying bare the challenges in fat fashion, or sharing the voices of fat people in genuine and compassionate ways. As I got further into the work, however, it was clear that there was a significant lack of Fat studies research that reckons in nuanced and complex ways with race and racism. I realized that I, as a white person, could see my own reflection in the mirror of fat studies scholarship, because the scholarship, participants, and narratives were largely white-washed. But I wondered if the people in my life who are Black, Indigenous, or Racialized¹ in other ways would be able to see their reflection as well.

Though Rinaldi, Rice, and Friedman (2019) agree that the “normative subject of the field still tends to be a young(ish), white, cisgender woman, and typically one who is from the Global North”, there has been significant efforts in the field to “thicken fat” beyond this one-dimensional, essentialized ‘body’ of work (p. 2). This MRP will look at how the field of fat studies has intentionally attempted to ‘thicken’ its understanding of fat, particularly around issues of race, over the course of its emergence and establishment as a field of study. I will do so by comparing works in two readers, one published at the field’s ‘nascent’ period and one at current, to look at the nuances in the way they discursively position whiteness and race within fat studies.

Some Terminology and Critical Positioning

Before delving into the work I have done, it is important to explain some of the terminology I intend to use throughout this paper to set my intentions and ensure that my work is in line with my epistemological positioning. I will be using the words “fat” and “fatness” when referring to body size, shape, appearance, and so on. Rather than pulling from biomedical terminology that not only assumes a

¹ Throughout this paper, ‘Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people’ will be used to refer to people demarcated as “racial Others” (Pon, Gosine, & Philips, 2011, p. 387). Rather than using the more common ‘People of Colour’, I will be using ‘Racialized people’ to intentionally invoke the historical and current processes that have rendered white people as ‘without race’, while simultaneously marking ‘racial Others’ for their deviance from the white norm. I have chosen to mention Black and Indigenous people specifically to draw attention to the unique oppression that they have and continue to face, particularly within the Canadian context.

“normal” weight, but also assumes that there are objective, numerical signifiers of health (Evans & Colls, 2009; Rothblum, 2012), I intend on pulling from fat studies. The identifier “fat” has been reclaimed in an “ideological move”, or “a sidestepping” (Eckert, 2008, p. 464) of dominant discursive meanings. The intentional use of the word in fat studies works two-fold: 1) to normalize the “simple fact of human weight diversity”, and 2) to challenge and eliminate the negative discursive associations around body size (Rothblum, 2012, p. 3). To encompass a greater realm of experience for those in diverse bodies, I also intend to talk about people with “a relationship with fatness” (Friedman, personal communication, 2019). In using this term, I hope to further the normalization of fatness, as I know that even people who do not live in a socially deemed “fat” body can identify with feelings of fat aversion and weight-based shame.

When discussing race, I will be making choices that symbolically subvert white dominance (Nishi, 2019). Following work by scholars like Nishi (2019), I am intentionally going to be using lowercase lettering when discussing ‘whiteness’ and ‘white people/supremacy/privilege’. In addition, I will be capitalizing identifiers such as ‘Black’, ‘Indigenous’, and ‘Racialized people/scholars/women’ to centre and value their experiences and contributions to society, academia, and the field of fat studies.

Though I will be making explicit the links between fatness and whiteness, I also think it is key to recognize that whiteness, white supremacy, and colonialism also facilitate other oppressive forces such as transphobia and cissexism, heterosexism, capitalism, ableism, sanism – all of which intersect in important ways to fatness as well and shift how fat bodies that hold multiple intersecting identities walk in the world. By focusing on whiteness, white supremacy, and colonialism, however, I hope to support their destabilization that goes beyond their existence in discussions of fatness and fat studies, towards the challenging of other oppressions that continue practices of marginalization and violence unto bodies that fall outside the normative mould of whiteness.

Subject Positioning: Locating Myself through Histories and Orientation to the Work

It is critical, especially in light of this paper’s focus, to begin with positioning myself. I am a white, cisgender woman who lives in a fluctuating yet constant relationship with fat, and who is also a

graduate social work student. The histories of the identities I live through are key foundations as to why I chose to pursue this topic. White, cis-female social workers have a long history as agents of Canada's colonial state, and have played a key role in the denigration, incarceration, and decimation of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized peoples across the land. Social work was integral in Canada's early years as a colonial state in the demarcation of "colour lines" that function to dominate and marginalize groups of people along the axes of race; lines that continue to exist today (Lee & Ferrer, 2014, p. 1). Settler feminism, or the ways in which white Canadian women participated in and enabled colonial practices in the name of 'equality', was a key feature in early social work that furthered the establishment of these colour lines (Johnstone, 2018). Regardless of the related atrocities committed knowingly at the hands of white social workers, we are often held to what Pon, Phillips, Clarke and Abdillahi (2017) call exalted subjectivity, or the notion that white people/social workers/white social workers (especially when female) are inherently altruistic and beneficent. These histories weigh heavily as I write this paper and endeavour to challenge the dominance of whiteness. As such, I cannot assume that my experience of or relation to fatness are representative of others' stories (especially those of people who are Black, Indigenous, or Racialized). To do so would be what Fellows and Razack (1998) a "race to innocence" (p. 335), which would only allow me to fall back into the white norm and perpetuate the very thing I have attempted to challenge. In addition to continuing to reflexively position myself and my knowledge, as I will detail throughout this paper, I have also made theoretical and methodological choices that intentionally call attention to my positionality and the ways it manifests in my work.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In looking deeper into whiteness in the field of fat studies, especially at its inception, I came across several key ‘bodies’ of work that were relevant to various aspects of this topic. The following will outline key discursive understandings of fatness, all of which are located within whiteness and assume a race-neutral approach. In addition, it will outline trajectories of whiteness and colonialism (particularly within the Canadian context), in academia, and in the field of fat studies.

Discursive Constructions of Fatness

Before delving into each of discursive constructions of fatness I have collected here, I think it is key to note that each one, though taking different approaches to fatness, is rooted in race-neutrality. Even though fatphobia and white supremacy are inexplicably linked, as I will illustrate and discuss in *Chapters 5 and 6* of this MRP, my literature review in this subsection does not take up race or whiteness in critical ways. I have chosen, however, to keep this subsection as it was written, as I feel that it speaks to the ways in which whiteness and white supremacy are rendered invisible in any approach to research on fatness. The literature that I have chosen to include here are some of the most accessible or popular sources, at least in my searches, that discuss fatness and fatphobia though they clearly erase discussions of racism and white supremacy. As such, I feel it is key to highlight these discursive constructions while also understanding that there is a significant white supremacist gap in their discussions.

Fatness as obesity is rooted in the biomedical model that upholds positivist, modernist science. It focuses on fatness as a disease or pathology that must be cured. This approach to fatness understands it as a health condition that is increasing in numbers to the point of a “global epidemic”, which has significant negative impacts on both individual and collective health (Barned & O’Doherty, 2019, p. 28). When an individual’s body weight falls either above or below the accepted standard, they are thereby deemed unhealthy and “correctable” (O’Hara & Taylor, 2018, p. 2). One of the tools this model uses to approach who is ‘(ab)normal’ is the Body Mass Index (BMI), which deigns bodies based on weight and marks them for intervention appropriately (Wills et al., 2006, Friedman, 2012). This measure has been adopted

on a wide scale, such as by the World Health Organization (see WHO, 2020), the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (see Levine, Murphy, Stewart, & Pierce, 2015; The Royal College, 2013; The Royal College, 2015), as well as Health Canada (see Government of Canada, 2019), among others, thereby becoming the “gold standard” for assessing one’s health. Though, as has been shown by numerous scholars from diverse disciplines, BMI may neither be a reliable or valid measure of one’s health, as it does not correlate strongly with health outcomes, shows bias when applied to ‘non-white’ people, and is an arbitrary measure (Rote, Klos, & Swartz, 2015; Jackson, Ellis, McFarlin, Sailors, & Bray, 2009, p. 871; Friedman, 2012).

The public health “war on obesity” utilizes these measures to convey that increased body weight is a matter of collective safety through discussions of morality and fear (Friedman, 2012; White, 2013). Language of a “worldwide pandemic” (Speakman & O’Rahilly, 2012, p. 569) or a step down the evolutionary ladder (White, 2013) is common. In response to this war, a large portion of the research focuses “what causes fat”, such as one’s genetic predisposition to weight gain (Speakman & O’Rahilly, 2012), greater late-day food intake (Reeves et al., 2014), and underestimation of one’s “weight status” (Rote et al., 2015, p. 608). Significant research has also been done on how to “cure fat”, such as consciousness-raising (Larkin & Martin, 2016; Rote et al., 2015), pharmacological solutions to suppress appetite and increase metabolism (Derbyshire, Shek, & Szkotak, 2013), and individualized, behaviour management interventions that emphasize the individual’s responsibility to cure themselves (Brown, Weber, & Ali, 2009).

Viewing *fatness as socially determined* attempts to go beyond the individual to focus on how society may contribute to the increase in ‘obesity’ rates. The concept of an obesogenic environment fits well in this category, as it describes the ways in which urban planning, the cost of healthy living, sedentary practices, and other organizational factors, can contribute to ‘obesity’ prevalence rising in a population (White, 2013). Salas (2015) notes that some common solutions proposed through this model include accurate and highly visible information on menus and labels, addressing healthy food deserts, taxing unhealthy foods, and increasing access to healthy options in food assistance programs (p. e80).

Though the use of this model does attempt a structural approach, this model actually supports the dominant association of fatness with a lack of self-control with a focus on individual responsabilization (White, 2013; Salas, 2015; Mik-Meyer, 2010): there are people who are (or have become) “normal weight” within an obesogenic environment, so there is no reason why fat people cannot just do the same thing. This allows for the denial that systemic sizeism exists and reinforces the role of the individual to “fix their fat”.

Fatness as reality, rooted in the fat studies approach, very intentionally looks at the structural factors that (re)produce what is constructed as “fat” as well as its impacts on individuals and society as a whole. Rather than looking at the causes of fatness to attempt to eliminate fatness, fat studies looks at “what people and societies make of [the] reality” of fat bodies in the world (Wann, 2009, p. x). Rothblum (2012) agrees, writing that the field “regards weight, like height, as a human characteristic that varies widely across any population”, therefore challenging this stigma associated with non-normative bodies (p. 3).

A large portion of the work in this field focuses on the stigma experienced by fat people as a result of the widespread “fear of fat” established by the dominant biomedical approach. Fat stigma can be found in family settings (Rogers, Taylor, Jafari, & Webb, 2019), dating circles, social interaction, and healthcare contexts (Taylor & Gailey, 2019), weight treatment settings (Groven & Zeller, 2018), in health circles like running (Snizek, 2019; Inderstrodth-Stephen & Acharya, 2018). One study’s participants felt this stigma so deeply that “the overwhelming majority indicated that if there were a magic pill that would make them thin that they would take it” (Taylor & Gailey, 2019, p. 6). Even when practicing healthy habits (especially running, which Snizek (2019) describes as the quintessential path to fitness), fat bodies are still regulated in their very presence. The stigmatization of fat female bodies has concrete and impactful consequences in the lives of folks in various relationships to fat. Taylor and Gailey (2019) noted that “most [of their participants] expressed that it is extremely difficult to completely accept one’s (fat) body in a culture that is extraordinarily fat-phobic” (p. 6). With the recent push for body positivity, fat people are finding themselves within a dichotomous pull, between body acceptance/positivity and the

need to feel shameful about being the size one is. Effects include mental health challenges (Rath & Behura, 2015), the denial of fat oppression (Akoury, Schafer, & Warren, 2019), as well as internalized stigma and disordered eating (Major, Viljoen, & Nel, 2019)

Fat studies literature also emphasizes the fat body's constant state of surveillance and (self)regulation in relation to "biomedical constructions of appropriate body size and its relationship to 'good health'" (Wills et al., 2006, p. 396). Mik-Meyer (2010) notes that those whose bodies do not fit the mould are seen as "lack[ing in] self-discipline, control, and willpower" (p. 388), and therefore must be regulated. Physical regulation - like diet culture, weight loss programs, and products like "skinny tea" - all emphasize individual changes to behaviour to "fix fat". Spatial regulation - such as the size of chairs, or seats on public transit, and the slimness of change rooms or bathroom stalls - all reinforce that fat bodies do not belong. Moral regulation can take multiple forms – one of which includes ridicule, in which fat bodies are positioned as the "other" (i.e. not part of the "us") and portrayed by images such as pigs or couch potatoes (White, 2013). Social regulation may take the form of the constant bombardment of images depicting only forays out of the fat body (Friedman, 2012), such as before and after images in weight loss ads, the promotion of supplements and cleanses on social media, and so on. It may also take the form of actual comments by family members, friends, and sometimes even strangers who tell us we have had enough to eat, or we should not wear something that shows off our "extra mass".

Another major theme in the literature was that fatness is complex and fluid. In Major and colleagues' (2019) work, they and participants discussed the subjective experience of "feeling fat" (p. 52), which is complex and context specific. Wills and colleagues (2006) found that young adults still thought they were "overweight" or expressed anxiety about gaining weight even though they were medically and aesthetically of a "normal" weight. Teenagers who are overweight often "have complex and, often, contradictory, feelings about their own and others' bodies" with diverse experiences of "normal" and overweight bodies within a single school environment (Wills et al., 2006, p. 403). Wills and colleagues (2006) found that weight-based stigma extended to youth who were 'normal weight', who still thought they were overweight or expressed anxiety about gaining. As a result of this fear of fatness, both fat and

“normal-bodied” folks enforce control and self-discipline to show that they indeed, are attempting to not be(come) fat. The self-regulation that fat bodies are instructed to adopt and maintain to solve their “fat” is often conducive to disordered eating or other harmful behaviours that in bodies who happen to be under “normal” weight, would be discouraged and cured (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006), Brown and colleagues (2009) draw attention to the ways in which eating disorders show both how harmful the fear of fat can be, but also signify the mastery of the very self-discipline that those in fat bodies are supposed to adopt.

The complexity and fluidity of our relationships with fatness speaks to fat studies’ use of embodiment as both a legitimate way of knowing as well as a “body” of resistance and de/reconstruction (McPhail, Brady, & Gingras, 2017). Rice (2015) speaks to the use of “embodied ethics” that values people’s lived experience, acknowledges diversity in experience, and rejects objectivity or “professional detachment”. Within the field of fat studies, the particular embodied knowledge invoked is that of fat people, to speak to the unfair treatment, discrimination, and regulation they face on an everyday basis. By employing this embodiment, they are able to prove, through their “testimonials”, that fatphobia and its related material effects are in fact real. Though Rice (2015) and Pausé (2019) point to the importance of a nuanced intersectional approach with clear attention to whiteness and privilege, it is clear that much of the work at the beginning of fat studies did not reckon in these significant and complex ways with intersectionality. More specifically, the ways in which racism and whiteness intersect with the experience of fatness. Looking at works from Mollow (2017), who discusses the ways in which size, ableism, and anti-Black racism intersect, and Bamed and O’Doherty (2019), who discuss cultural differences in the social construction of fat, simply as quick cursory searches, speak to this importance. So why, then, did early fat studies not include critical conversations about race when discussing relationships with fatness?

Whiteness, Cognitive Imperialism, and Epistemic Injustice

The second body of work that was key included whiteness and white supremacy, and their presence in broader society, in academia, and in fat studies. Largely included in this is the epistemic

erasure (which will be discussed in further detail) of work, especially written by Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people, that calls attention to and challenges white normativity. Bilge (2013) writes that whiteness is “a structurally advantaged position” or a “privileged standpoint from which white people view themselves, others, and society” (p. 412). Whiteness, and the related concept of white supremacy, is established and perpetuated by becoming the invisible norm, to which all Others are measured to (Bilge, 2013). It therefore becomes the dominant epistemology, or the “proper” ways of knowing, being, and understanding the world around us, into which diverse experiences become subsumed, and either co-opted or erased (Vaditya, 2018). White bodies largely go unexamined, unsurveilled, and unregulated, while bodies of Black, Indigenous, and other Racialized people remain under a constant state of surveillance and pressure to adhere to the standards of whiteness. I, as someone who is white, do not have to hear the incessant question of “where are you from?” (read as: you are not from here, you do not belong), to deal with the fetishization of “exotic” skin tones or features, or other comments of the like. As Fanon (1952) writes, “my blackness was there, dense and undeniable” (p. 96): regardless of the situation, Racialized people are forced to reckon with the impacts of racism and shadeism on an everyday basis.

The epistemic dominance of whiteness was solidified through two simultaneous processes. The first occurred during the Enlightenment Era, through which a clear (read: white) line between science and “non-science” was drawn, establishing science as the only valid and legitimate way of knowing (Vaditya, 2018). Vaditya (2018) writes that through the epistemic lens of white science, key tenets of “rationality, reason, objectivity, and impartiality” were privileged, while their “opposites” were devalued and ignored (p. 273). Science, then, becomes the only true path to knowledge; a path only open to legitimate knowers. The second occurred through the systemic demarcation of Black, Indigenous, and other historically Racialized people as fundamentally incapable of being knowers. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes that peoples marked as “primitive” had an inability to create culture, to create organizational structure, to operationalize rationality, and to ‘capitalize’ on the land and its resources: “by lacking such virtues, we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization, but from humanity itself” (p. 25). Pon and colleagues (2011) write that the epistemic dominance of science also took up these discourses, resulting in scientific

racism that only further established white supremacy and the lack of humanity of non-white bodies. In context of Turtle Island (or the colonized land that is now North America), the doctrine of *terra nullius*, or “nobody’s land”, that was used to stake claim on and colonize the land of Turtle Island, implies that the land was void of anyone who could legitimately make use of it (Mack & Na’puti, 2019). Even though Indigenous Peoples had been living and thriving on Turtle Island since time immemorial, white settlers marked them as ‘empty’, void of (white) rationality and reason, and therefore virtually inhuman. The colonial relationship includes three parties according to Tuck and Yang (2014): the white settlers with a mastery over the land and the people on it, the erasure (both ideological and physical) of Indigenous people, and the “chattel slaves” that were both exploitable and expendable (p. 224). Rowe and Tuck (2017) write that Canada’s history and presence of colonialism rest on the continuous restatement of this relationship - that Indigenous people, as well as other ‘non-white subjects’, are fundamentally unable to exist as rational, “modern” subjects. By simultaneously establishing (white) epistemic authority and devaluing Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people’s ways of knowing (and very existence), whiteness and white supremacy are allowed to maintain their dominance.

These systemic patterns are replicated in academic settings as well, within which non-white bodies become the pathologized and dissected subjects of research, or as researchers, scholars, and activists, their work is devalued or ignored. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) writes that is clear to see the former by “whose bodies, land, beliefs, and values have been travelled *through*” (p. 81). People who have been historically marginalized are often only allowed to speak to the pain they endure, and the damage done to their individual and collective bodies (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Pain-centred research leads to what Tuck and Yang (2014) call “double erasure” through which communities’ are not provided significant change to address their pain (i.e. pain is shared, documented, and effectively erased), while also replacing the stories of pain with hopeful stories of white progress (p. 231). In addition, there are numerous instances of Racialized people’s bodies being used as guinea pigs for the betterment of white bodies, such as the 1930s Tuskegee Experiment conducted on Black men who were allowed to die from syphilis though there was a known cure (Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee, 1996), the 1970s experiments on Navajo

people to document the effects of uranium exposure on humans that not only harmed the people but destroyed the land (Tsosie, 2012), and the 1940s experiments on Mayan and other Indigenous Guatemalan sex workers and prisoners in Guatemala during which they were purposely infected, largely were not treated, and were left to suffer and die (Reverby, 2012). When Black, Indigenous, and other Racialized people are allowed into the academy, they often face significant barriers. Johnson (2019) notes that, through the establishment of white bodies as the legitimate knowledge producers, academia functions as a “sharp white background ... that makes Black and Brown scholars so visible as deviations” (p. 91). Chilisa (2012) agrees, writing that Racialized researchers are not given the same chance as their white counterparts, and are pushed to the periphery in the process of knowledge production. The work that then emerges from those processes often only supports the status quo, rather than challenging it. Further, Matias, Walker, and del Hierro (2019) note that the narratives of Racialized women are often “marginalized, rendered biased, ignored, or minimized as ‘just your story’”, outside of the lines of what is considered knowledge (p. 38). They write that the role of “Black and Brown bodies” in the academy is “to glitter their brochures as proof of diversity on campus, all while using our intellect and forced complicity to stroke their egos of whiteness” (Matias et al., 2019, p. 36). Along with the erasure of Racialized people’s scholarship and activism, their work is often either co-opted by white researchers or are reduced solely to a response or criticism of the work already set out by white activist-scholars² (Jonsson, 2016).

This erasure, unfortunately, plays out in the field of fat studies as well, as Farrell (2019) writes that its origin story is “inherently white” in who it holds as its originators and its analysis (p. 29). Some common names and works that have emerged throughout my literature review include *Fat Studies in the UK* and the work of its editors Tomrley and Kaloski-Naylor (2009), *The Fat Studies Reader* and the work of its editors Rothblum and Solovay (2009), work by Cooper (1998) on the politics of (fat) embodiment,

² I intentionally use the term ‘activist-scholars’ to highlight the role that both activism and scholarship has played in the fat acceptance movement and Fat Studies field. Later in this paper, it is also used to highlight the ways in which activism is sometimes devalued in the eyes of the academy, which prefers scholarly, peer-reviewed, and rigorous research. It is my understanding that activists, though they may not have written ‘scholarly’ papers, or not at all, they have nonetheless contributed in irrefutable ways to the theorizing in the field of Fat Studies and I have recognized them as such.

work by Louderback (1970) on fat power and the normalization of fat, work by the Fat Underground such as the Fat Liberation Manifesto (Freespirit & Aldebaran, 1973), work by feminist sociologists like Bordo (1993) and Hesse-Biber (1997) who criticize society's obsession with thinness, and others. It is not that these activist-scholars' works are unable to 'hold water' simply because they are white(-passing) or that there is in general a lack of discussion of race and racism. Rather, it is that these names and works are being held as inceptors (Farrell, 2019) *without* any mention of the Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people who have fought for the same exact things, as well as work that intentionally brings a race-based lens to the discussion. fat studies' lack of a nuanced reckoning with race and colonialism, especially in its early years as an academic field, is not a simple 'oversight' or 'mistake'. Rather, it is an issue of epistemic injustice, through which erasure and invalidation calls into question the "capacity of a knower/subject of knowledge" (Johnstone & Lee, 2018, p. 234). In this case, lack of theorizing about fat bodies that are *not* white, more so from the voices of fat Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people themselves, erases their presence and invalidates their contributions to the field. The reality that only *one* work I engaged with around the history of fat activism and scholarship (see Farrell, 2019) included early discussions of fatness by Black women in particular, including Johnnie Tillmon (1972) and Grace Nichols (1984). Where is the recognition for the work of fat activist-scholars who are Black, Indigenous, and Racialized, who have and continue to contribute in unignorable ways?

Activism and scholarship (both that which is considered "academic" and not) that reckoned intentionally with race, colonialism, and bodies' relationships with fatness is, in my opinion, difficult to find, but 'robust' nonetheless. Although I cannot do their and others' important work justice within the scope of this paper, I want to highlight some of the activist-scholars that have opened the epistemological door beyond just my own inklings of a problem. Roxane Gay is an activist-writer that writes about feminism, race, gender, and pop culture - most notably, her memoir titled *Hunger*, discusses both individual and collective relationships with bodies and food from the perspective of a Black woman (Gay, n.d.; Gay, 2017). Sonya Renee Taylor is a long-time activist-scholars whose issues of focus centre on fatness, Blackness, and radical self-love: she is best known for her work *The Body is not an Apology*,

which is both a book and a movement (Taylor, n.d.). The online “intersectional feminist publication” *Wear Your Voice* (WYW) intentionally takes an intersectional approach to representation, and privilege the voices of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people on issues such as fatness, identity, and sexuality (WYV, n.d., para. 1). There is also a large number of writers like Sydney Greene (2019) and Hess Love (2018) who write about fatphobia and liberation with an emphasis on whiteness and white supremacy, racism, and colonialism. Stephanie Yeboah is a fat advocate, plus-size style blogger, and journalist who speaks about body acceptance and whiteness in fat advocacy (Yeboah, n.d., Dash, 2018). Ashleigh Shackelford is an artist and advocate with a focus on Black bodies, fatness, and (queer) sexuality, and is the founder of “Free Figure Revolution, which focuses on decolonizing antiblack body violence” (Shackelford, n.d., para. 2). Sonalee Rashatwar is a social worker, sex therapist, and fat activist who has continually questioned whiteness in fat activism and studies (Rashatwar, n.d.). Marie Denée is a body image advocate and fashion expert who founded *The Curvy Fashionista*, an online space that pushes for size inclusive, diverse, and representative fashion (Denée, n.d.). Brandi Michele is a fat, Black activist who emphasizes the normalization and visibility of fat, Black bodies through dance, beauty, and their podcast “Fat Black Audacity” (Michele, n.d.). Works by white scholars like Amy Farrell (2011) and Anna Mollow (2017), who draw necessary and nuanced connections between race, colonialism, the discourse of “civilized bodies”, and (dis)ability, all in relation to fatness, are also important in further opening the epistemological door. Opening this door also required possibilities for changes - what a fat studies might look like that does account for race and fat in caring yet also complex ways.

In looking for an answer to these questions, I came across *Thickening Fat*, edited by May Friedman, Carla Rice, and Jennifer Rinaldi (2019). I began by skimming it, and then found myself drawn into the possibilities this text presented: the intentional discussion of the diverse intersections of race and fat operates in stark contrast to the work especially at the beginning of fat studies’ establishment in academia. Though the two bodies of work in this literature review, for the most part, run parallel to each other, it is clear that there are unexamined and taken-for-granted connections between them. This MRP, then, will focus on the key gap that these discussions have revealed: the lack of nuanced and intentional

discussion of the intersections of fatness and race in fat studies literature, especially in its early years. It is also necessary to look at how addressing this gap could look: by comparing literature in the early stages of fat studies with literature emerging out of the field at current.

Search Terms and Methods

The literature collected for this MRP included works sourced from Ryerson's Library database and Google Scholar, relevant course materials collected throughout my academic career, suggestions by colleagues and supervisors, and 'reference rabbit holes', or using the references of collected works to delve further into the work. Some of the keywords used included "fat studies", "fat activism", "fatness", "experience of fat", "fat panic", "war on obesity", "BMI", "fat women", "fat women's experiences", "whiteness", "whiteness in academia", "critical race theory", "critical whiteness studies", "intersectionality".

CHAPTER 3: GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

There are three theoretical frameworks that will guide this work and have emerged out of the epistemological discussions had throughout the prewriting stage and in the literature review: fat studies, critical race feminism (CRF), and critical whiteness studies (CWS). Fat studies will function as a general frame through which the texts I am engaging with will be viewed, as each text explicitly takes this theoretical framework, among others. My engagement with fat studies as a theoretical holding is what brought me to this piece of writing. Though I think fat studies is problematic in its lack of critical engagement with race, I will be using it pointedly in conjunction with race-based theories to name, centre, and challenge whiteness, as well as to hold the possibility for a critical, race-based fat studies. As the theoretical positioning of fat studies has been discussed, this section will focus on CRF and CWS, some key tenets, and how I intend to use them throughout the course of my analysis.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

Razack, Smith, and Thobani (2010) write that CRF “interrogates questions ... about racialized, gendered relations in an ostensibly race-& gender- neutral liberal state” (p. 9). It was borne out of “feminist, critical legal, and critical race” perspectives, that are said to be a response to Racialized women’s exclusion from discussions of gender (focused on white women) or race (focused on Racialized men) (Clark & Saleh, 2019). In light of the reality that Racialized women’s theorizing is often only positioned in response to the oversights of white people (Jonsson, 2016), it is important to establish that Racialized women, particularly Black women, have spoken to the interlocking oppressions they face since time immemorial (Clark & Saleh, 2019). CRF scholars writing from a U.S. perspective often focus on racism and sexism, though Canadian-based CRF scholars integrate discussions of colonialism that look at how Indigenous women live histories and currencies of Canada’s colonial legacy (Razack et al., 2010).

Kohli and Burbules (2012) state that there are three “foundational pillars” that support the epistemic dominance of whiteness as discussed previously, including “objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality”, that must be broken down for counter-discourses to emerge (p. 38). Jones and Okun (2001)

articulate further pillars, of particular note include the worship of the written word, individualism, and perfectionism. Like critical race theory (CRT), from which CRF builds, CRF challenges claims of race- and gender-neutral policy and practices that ultimately decentre and invalidate systemic racism and sexism (Abrams & Moio, 2009, Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Where CRF diverges from CRT, however, is that it centres the “roles, experiences, and narratives of women of colour” in analyzing systemic forces and institutions (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, p. 24). In doing so, the goal of CRF is to address, reduce, and ultimately eliminate the systemic inequities that Racialized women face on an everyday basis (Few, 2007). In my work, I hope to add to the advocacy and literature that challenges both the latent and overt whiteness in fat studies and academia as a whole. I think it is important to reiterate that I, and other fat, white, female scholars, are *not* the first ones to call attention to this issue, and that my work rests on the immense activism and scholarship of those who have, especially Black, Indigenous, and Racialized women. In a world that is increasingly evidence-based and requires scholarly proof to substantiate knowledge claims in ‘acceptable’ ways, I hope that my work can be used by future fat activist-scholars whether in and of itself, or as a door to the important works and people I have engaged with.

Throughout these de/reconstructive processes, CRF utilizes an anti-essentialist and intersectional approach to emphasize that “identity [and by extension, oppression] is not additive” (Wing, 2000, p. 7). Intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw (1989), speaks to the ways in which race and gender intersect to shift how Black women experience oppression in different ways than Black men and white women. As the concept gained increasing attention, it was applied to additional axes of identity such as (dis)ability, sexuality, gender expression, socioeconomic class, and so on. CRF emphasizes that there is no essential female experience, though historically, much of feminism presents those of white, middle-class women as the norm (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Few (2007) agrees: by rejecting notions of essentialism, CRF allows for recognition of the diverse subject positions that women hold, and therefore means that analysis has the potential to be more nuanced. In my analysis, I intend to use anti-essentialist and intersectional approaches to attend to the nuances in experience that may be present in the texts that I

engage with. Though I may employ critical strategic essentialism³, the acknowledgement and critical application of diversity will be key in complicating processes of Othering.

Pon and colleagues (2011) identify self-reflexivity and positioning oneself as key features of CRF. This need is especially important for white people, who must implicate themselves in systems of oppression and reckon with the privileges they are afforded (Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011). As a white woman using CRF, I have a responsibility to not only position myself in the work, but also to acknowledge what I do not (and cannot) know by virtue of my identity. I will also continue efforts to centre and privilege Black, Indigenous, and Racialized women's contributions to fat studies and academia at large in this MRP as well as in my own life.

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS)

Though CRF does provide a solid theoretical base to engage with texts and centres race as an 'entry point' to analysis (Abrams & Moio, 2009), I also wanted to intentionally name whiteness as a systemic issue that (re)produces itself through literature. I chose CWS as it "provides a framework to deconstruct how whites accumulate racial privilege beyond the naïve acknowledgement that Band Aids only come in light-beige" (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p. 34). Nishi (2019) notes that though CWS is said to have originated in white, feminist spaces, its origins can be found in work by Black scholars like W.E.B. DuBois (1903), Frantz Fanon (1952), and James Baldwin (1961). To add to the previous definition by Bilge (2013), whiteness is the institutionalization of the dominant group's power in a manner that allows it to remain unnoticed, unquestioned, and 'normal' (Yee, 2005). Those who fit within the scope of whiteness are therefore placed in a "privileged place of racial normativity" (Wray & Newitz, 1997, p. 3), while groups of people who fall outside it become othered. Whiteness and white supremacy become "all-encompassing and omnipresent" as the "background against which other systems are defined" (Taylor,

³ This term was communicated to me by Sharon McLeod, who is a Black social worker and lecturer at Ryerson, in the fourth year of my Bachelor of Social Work. Critical strategic essentialism includes intentionally grouping people together to make a systemic statement. As an example, the ways in which Racialized people who are fat experience the world differently than white people who are fat. This does not, however, preclude attention to diversity within groups, which anti-essentialism calls for.

Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 4). Matias and colleagues (2019) emphasize that whiteness, white supremacy, and white privilege are especially invisible to white people, as they do not have to reckon with its adverse effects as Racialized people do. They underscore CRF's commitment to centring the narratives of Racialized people for this very reason. CWS also shares with CRF a commitment to anti-essentialism and intersectionality. Johnson (2019) writes that CWS looks intentionally at processes of Othering (i.e. demarcating and denigrating those who are *not* white), but also emphasizes that all experiences of Othering are not the same.

I chose to use CWS in addition to CRF because of its specific focus on whiteness and the ways in which it manifests, both implicitly and explicitly. Particularly in the field of fat studies, where whiteness has silenced nuanced discussions of race (especially when put forth by Black, Indigenous, and Racialized scholars), CWS explicitly positions whiteness as the underlying structure that enables its dominance and its effects. Though CRF does the important work of addressing systems such as race, colonialism, and gender, I agree with Nishi, Matias, and Montoya (2015) that whiteness has a tendency to re-centre itself in ways that support its dominance, rather than challenge it. How can I guard against this throughout my work? The short answer is that I cannot. The long answer: the insidious nature of whiteness and its dominance allows it to “[reproduce] itself regardless of one’s intention” (Dryer, 2008, p. 12). Especially as a white person who has been able to access and benefit from the white privilege I have been afforded, it would be facetious of me to imply that I will be immune to the erasing and silencing natures of whiteness throughout this work. This does not, however, mean that I am absolved of the necessity of genuine and critical reflexivity as I endeavor to address and challenge whiteness. Rather, it means that I will have to be reflexively rigorous and accountable to the epistemological and theoretical positions I have put forth thus far throughout this work.

Concluding Theoretical Thoughts

Fat studies, CRF, and CWS will form the basis of my approach throughout this paper. In a conversation with my amazing research supervisor, we came to the analogy of a pair of glasses within

which fat studies forms the frame and CRF and CWS form the lenses. Fat studies acts as a paradigmatic frame through which the works I will be engaging with must be viewed: not only do they write from this perspective, but for me to challenge whiteness in fat studies, I must be able to invoke and shift the way it is applied. CRF acts as a theoretical lens that will bring into focus the mechanisms of race, colonialism, and gender, as well as the ways that narratives of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people (especially those who are female-identified), are essentialized, devalued, and erased. CWS also acts as a theoretical lens that will make clear the lines that whiteness functions to blur, including its normativity, invisibility, and processes of Othering.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Research Question

Hunter (2002) asserts that research questions are never neutral; rather, they originate from within a specific epistemological framework, and will therefore shift depending on one's approach. As such, my research questions will be rooted in the theoretical positioning that I have put forth, as well as my intentions that I have laid out thus far throughout the course of my MRP. The research questions that will therefore guide my research include: (1) How has whiteness become invisible in the field of fat studies? (2) In what ways does this unexamined whiteness manifest in the theorizing and work emerging from the field, especially during its early stages? Though not unrelated, a peripheral question that will guide my analysis is: (3) What might fat studies look like that both challenges its whiteness and incorporates a critical race-based approach?

Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Wodak and Meyer (2009) define CDA as a focus on “structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language” (p. 11). Key features of CDA include discourse, language, hegemony, and power - each of these features feed off the others in constitutive and reproductive ways. Discourse has a multitude of definitions depending on the theorist and their positioning but is generally understood to represent “structured forms of knowledge” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 6). To expand with my own understanding, discourse includes all of the ways in which we discuss, represent, and address a specific phenomenon, issue, or concept, which is rooted in a particular originating frame. Multiple discourses on the same topic often exist, which, more often than not, are fundamentally oppositional. As an example, there are numerous discourses on fatness: two of which include a biomedical approach, or fatness as obesity, and a fat studies approach, or fat bodies as normal and worthy. Though these two discourses are opposites in their approach to fatness, they both carry with them specific assumptions, representations, and ways to address fat bodies.

For a discourse to become dominant, it must be endorsed by those who are in positions of power. Each discourse comes from a particular standpoint, and thus carries with it assumptions about the people implicated within it, which often takes the form of a hierarchy. When those in power endorse a particular discourse with a particular hierarchy attached, dominant discourses induce and support marginalization of particular groups (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). When this domination is institutionalized through things like laws, social structures, and norms, it becomes hegemonic in nature (Van Dijk, 2001). A good example of this is the way in which whiteness and white supremacy achieve and continue to maintain discursive hegemony. Assumptions about white superiority, such as the “ability” to create culture and civilization, act as rational beings, and possess a particular likeness to God, put white people in positions of power (Tuhiwai Smith, 2007). In these positions, they legitimized their discursive claims using things like scientific racism and other arguments based in early eugenics. By establishing things like formal education (which further indoctrinated these ideas), legal systems (which allowed for the incarceration and segregation of ‘uncivilized peoples’), and academic disciplines (which studied deviance and justified domination), white supremacy and racism established themselves as hegemony.

One of CDA’s key points of focus is the use of language and the ways in which it maps onto discourse. Fairclough (2003) writes that “language is an irreducible part of social life”, and as such, must be scrutinized (p. 2). Wodak and Meyer (2009) agree, emphasizing the importance of the social context and functioning of language. Language carries with it discursive ideas as well as power. As an example, deeming a service user as hostile or ‘not ready for treatment’ because they do not want to answer deeply personal questions at a first meeting gatekeeps (or outright denies) their ability to access services. The language used here not only establishes the service provider as the expert knowledge holder, but also enforces requirements that service users must conform to access service.

Language, discourse, and power can all be pulled from CDA’s primary unit of analysis: texts, which are concrete representations of the more theoretical knowledge found in things (Lemke, 1995). Texts can be anything from images, to audio-visual content, policy briefs, transcripts, or more formal pieces of writing like journal articles or books. By looking at the ways in which power and discourse

imbues itself into a text, CDA meets its stated aim of studying social dominance, inequality, and marginalization (Van Dijk, 2001). Van Dijk (2001) writes that researchers using CDA “take an explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality” (p. 193), which this paper has attempted to do throughout. To summarize, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) articulate key features or assumptions of CDA. These include: “(1) CDA addresses social problems, (2) Power relations are discursive, (3) Discourse constitutes society and culture, (4) Discourse does ideological work, (5) Discourse is historical, (6) The link between text and society is mediated, (7) Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory, (8) Discourse is a form of social action” (p. 271-80).

There are numerous critiques of CDA that come from diverse disciplines and scholars (see Breeze (2011) for examples), though I pulled two relevant to this paper. CDA has been criticized for its lack of accessibility, cohesiveness, and abstraction - all of which make CDA difficult to use and can potentially reduce how ‘rigorous’ its results may be (Billig, 2008; Fairclough, 2008). In response, I followed recommendations from Fairclough (2003), which advocate a transdisciplinary approach to CDA. This approach has not only contextualized my use of CDA in theory, but also helped to solidify how I intend to use it - a process that has been further explained in the section where I discuss why I chose to use CDA. In addition, much of the literature I engaged with discussed CDA’s ability to “produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to *emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection*” and that the methodology has a “legacy of *enlightenment*” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7, 8). The ‘white saviour-esque’ approach that this languaging carries (Blackstock, 2009), it is, quite frankly, outrageous to assume that Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat activist-scholars do not know their work and presence is being marginalized. In fact, it is clear, by the long history of their work to challenge whiteness in fat spaces, the opposite is true. To move away from this enlighten/empowerment approach, I have and continue to endeavour to ground my research in the work of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat activist-scholars, historically and in the present.

Focus in CDA: Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Approach

Though many of the approaches to CDA could be applicable to this topic, I have chosen to focus on Fairclough's *dialectical-relational approach*. Wodak and Meyer (2009) note that this approach focuses on social conflict as a by-product of relations of difference and Othering, dominance, and resistance. Power is a key factor in these features and makes itself (in)visible through semiosis. Fairclough (2003) asserts that language "is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life" (p. 2) and should therefore be a key part of analysis. This focus is particularly important in "New Capitalism", which includes the current states of transnational capitalism, neoliberalism, and neo-colonialism, among others (Fairclough, 2002, p. 163). Language around issues of race and whiteness have long been researched in this fashion [see Abrams and Moio (2009) and critiques of 'race-neutrality' and 'cultural competency', or Tuhiwai Smith (1990) and discussions of 'civilized bodies' and 'humanity']. Therefore, the (lack of) language around whiteness in fat studies is not just an oversight by a few researchers or scholars: rather, it is socially meaningful and connected to broader maintenance of whiteness as the invisible norm. In this approach, there is a focus on hegemonic discursive regimes, which function as (re)establishment of the dominant discourse as an uncontested norm, as well as the essentializing, absorption, and erasure of diverse experiences into it. Language and discourse are thus tangible functions of hegemony (Fairclough, 2003).

Another key feature of Fairclough's model is the focus on the dialectical relation (hence its name) between language or literature and established discursive regimes. Indeed, CDA from this perspective allows for iterative analysis between specific texts and the "order of discourse", which Fairclough (2003) defines as socially constructed understandings of language as they relate to hegemonic social structures (p. 3). This approach thereby encourages intertextuality, or looking at the relationship between texts and orders of discourse, which is not necessarily facilitated by linguistic analysis on its own (Fairclough, 1992). For example, without viewing whiteness as a broader discursive issue – it becomes an issue simply of 'poor word choices' with 'unintended consequences' – and is only further perpetuated. Engaging critically with whiteness in fat studies, though potentially illuminated through linguistic and structural

choices, requires an understanding of whiteness as an order of discourse. Though much of my analysis focuses on the ways in which language does not challenge discursive regimes, Fairclough (1992) also holds space for moments of resistance that attempt to negotiate, shift, or redefine dominant discursive understandings. In the field of fat studies, there have been many of these moments, and as much as I would like to illustrate the ways that discussions of whiteness are ignored, it is also key to highlight these sites of discursive struggle and unsettling. This recognition is especially important in response to the peripheral guiding question posited earlier in this chapter.

Fairclough's approach also centres the necessary social justice orientation to research. In fact, research must begin with a "focus upon a specific social problem which has a semiotic aspect", and its contextualization within broader systems (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 30). Wodak and Meyer (2009) write that this approach should focus on groups of people and/or issues that have been historically marginalized. In this case, discussions of whiteness and race, as well as the activism and scholarship of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people, have been marginalized in the 'ivory towers' of the academy. By using this specific approach to CDA, specific connections are made between language and structure, and whiteness as an order of discourse in its many forms. These connections will be framed by some of Fairclough's key concepts, such as power and hegemonic dominance, discursive negotiations and shifts, iterative and dialectic relationships, and intertextuality.

CDA as an Intentional, Epistemological Choice

I chose to do CDA because of its alignment with the topic at hand as well as the theoretical positions that guide this research. According to Van Dijk (2001), CDA looks at the ways in which "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (p. 193). It attempts to make solid the abstract functioning of systems and structures by analyzing semiotic data (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). This methodology is especially useful when considering whiteness, as it often goes unexamined and therefore unchallenged due to its invisibility as the norm. By looking at the ways that language and structure can obscure whiteness and

preclude critical discussions about race, CDA has the potential to decenter whiteness as a normative inscription and re-centre it as a systemic issue in need of study and resistance. Moreover, Fairclough (2003) writes that CDA takes up how processes of Othering occur, specifically around how the dominant group establishes and maintains its state as the norm (or hegemony) and is therefore able to go unquestioned. This approach fits well with the topic of this MRP, as it has enabled a critical process for engaging with the presence of whiteness and erasure of race in fat studies literature. In addition, CWS and CRF share CDA's approach to addressing hegemonic whiteness and the way its functioning becomes obscured. All three also share a commitment to anti-essentialism and the challenging the assumption of one identity as the "universal" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 41) without attention to the ways diverse identities experience the world differently.

Van Dijk (2001) states that CDA's explicit goal is to "understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (p. 193), which fits well with my goal for this project: to add to the literature that makes visible the invisible whiteness inherent in fat studies and adding to the call for change. It also fits well with CWS and CRF, both of which ensure research has a critical "social justice agenda" that advocates for social change (Few, 2007, p. 457). In addition, CDA shares with CRF and CWS a rejection of what Fairclough (2003) calls "value-free" research (p. 352): or the assumption that research can be objective without the influence of the researcher(s), and that this type of research is not only possible, but the only legitimate or valid research. Further, CDA also positions the researcher as an active participant in the research, who cannot be 'divorced' from the functions and effects of discursive positions. In this way, CDA enforces a focus on structural indictment rather than individual exposition. I have taken this approach to the scholars and researchers that have been referenced throughout this work⁴, as well as to myself as a 'researcher'. I intentionally positioned myself at the beginning of my work, as well as throughout, to account for the limitations I encounter, as well as reflexive moments. As I have recounted in the last section of this chapter, I came to this work for a reason, and stayed with it for another - neither

⁴ This is further explained in the section around *Ethical Approaches*.

are immune to dominant discourses or value-based judgements. CDA, as well as CRF and CWS, provide a concrete framework for not only accounting for these realities, but also theorizing them in context.

Data Collection Methods - Purposive and Theoretical Sampling

To decide what pieces will be used for analysis, I have employed purposive and theoretical sampling. Faulkner & Faulkner (2014) define purposive sampling as selecting a sample based on knowledge of a particular population with predetermined characteristics in mind. The two collections of texts that were selected have several significant characteristics in relation to my guiding research questions. I selected *The Fat Studies Reader* edited by Rothblum and Solovay (2009) because it is often held as a foundational text in the field (Farrell, 2019) and is one of the first field-specific readers published and used in university classrooms. This reader was published in 2009 when Fat studies was in its early stages of establishment as an academic field (Wann, 2009). Therefore, I believe that delving deeper into this reader will allow for a critical look at Fat studies and its discursive engagement with whiteness in its emergent phase within a North American context. I selected *Thickening Fat: Fat Bodies, Intersectionality, and Social Justice* edited by Friedman and colleagues (2019) because it follows a similar format as the first collection, and to my knowledge, is the most recent publication of this nature within the North American context. In the ten years between the publication of these readers, Fat studies has shifted as it responds to critiques, and has had to reckon with its “heavy inheritance” (Friedman et al., 2019, p. viii) in much of the same way as I have begun to think through in this paper.

Though I view the readers themselves as texts, I have also selected six works from each collection as specific texts for closer analysis. I employed theoretical sampling to select these texts, which Charmaz (1990) explains as data that is collected to “extend theoretical categories” (p. 1163). Wodak and Meyer (2009) write that often in CDA, data analysis does not follow collection in linear ways: rather, data collection and analysis are iterative, and rely on the other to fill the sample and generate conclusions. The rest of the texts were selected in a delayed fashion in order to foster “developing conceptual ideas” (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1163), rather than getting stuck in what I had decided prior to actually critically

engaging. As I engaged with the readers, I read virtually every chapter to gather a broader picture of each approach. As previously stated, I thought it was important to include the introduction to each reader, as they set the tone and are written by the readers' editors⁵. I chose to include the foreword in *The Fat Studies Reader* as it, like the introduction, set the tone and was mentioned multiple times (including on the reader's front and back cover)⁶. Each reader had chapters that discussed the diverse histories of fatness and fatphobia, as well as fat studies and activism, which were important to include as I intended to look at where the field was situated (or more aptly, who it was situated with) as well as whether fatness was considered intersectionally at all⁷. Interestingly, both readers took up how fat bodies take up space in academia, particularly through physical space, though in much different ways⁸. The remaining chapters from each reader were selected based on their engagement (or lack of) with fatphobia with a critical lens on whiteness⁹. Each chapter was selected in an iterative process that supported existing theory building.

Research Ethics Board Approval: Rather, Ethical Approaches

As this paper engaged with secondary data that is publicly searchable and available, I was not required to submit for formal ethics approval. However, I thought carefully about how I wanted to approach this work from both a personal ethical place, as well as those of my epistemological approach. This work is not meant to 'call out' or 'expose' any of the researchers, scholars, and activists referenced around their intentions or character. From personal experience, that approach simply does not work, as it is often met with defensiveness (especially when it concerns issues of whiteness, shown through work by Matias, Montoya, and Nishi, 2016). Rather than focusing on individuals or "single-exchange situations", CDA focuses on the systems and structures that form and establish the very discourses that manifest in these micro-interactive circumstances (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It is also key to note that each reader is a collection of diverse scholars and edited by others: CDA views these collections as sites of discursive

⁵ This included Solovay and Rothblum (2009), as well as Rinaldi, Rice, and Friedman (2019).

⁶ The foreword was written by Wann (2009).

⁷ This included Levy-Navarro (2009), as well as Robinson (2019) and Farrell (2019).

⁸ This included Hetrick and Attig (2009), as well as Senyonga (2019).

⁹ This included Giovanelli and Ostertag (2009) and Royce (2009), as well as Meerai (2019) and Lind (2019).

shifts within which discourses are negotiated (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). As an example, even if there is a lack of critical engagement with whiteness in a reader as a whole, there will always be contributing scholars that do engage critically. In addition, CWS and CRF both agree that whiteness and its effects often reproduce themselves regardless of one's intentions due to its status as the invisible norm (Matias et al., 2019). Therefore, though I have referenced specific scholars, I have focused on the systemic issues that make these micro-interactive challenges possible as an ethical commitment.

Data Analysis Methods

Analysis of texts from a dialectical-relational approach within CDA include identifying both the dominant and subversive discursive constructions of the issue at hand (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It takes the form of three key steps that have been articulated by Wodak and Meyer (2009). The first includes a structural analysis of the context within which the issue of focus occurs. This analysis includes all of the work presented thus far, especially within the scope of the literature review. The second step includes an interactional analysis, through which language and various linguistic or literary features are emphasized. During this stage, I engaged with each text and highlighted each piece of languaging (whether individual words, key phrases, or other linguistic choices) relevant to discussions of race and whiteness. The third is an intertextual and interdiscursive analysis, that brings together the first two pieces of analysis, in addition to pieces from texts that support as well as challenge dominant discursive constructions. In this step, linguistic-based data pulled from the texts was integrated into contextual understandings, which include key discourses about whiteness and bodies that have been racialized.

Though Wodak and Meyer (2009) present Fairclough's method as steps that follow a linear order, my approach will be more iterative and non-linear. Because I employed theoretical sampling, in which data collection and analysis are neither mutually exclusive nor consecutive, these steps took the form of phases that were revisited when the data called for them. I drew inspiration from grounded theory's constant comparative method, which allows for fluid and multilinear engagements with data collection and analysis when needed (Hallberg, 2006).

As previously mentioned, Fairclough (2003) notes that CDA requires an interdisciplinary approach to analysis to not only contextualize, but also provide specific nuances to the process grounded in theory. CRF and CWS do not bring specific analytical methods to research, but rather analytic lenses through which to view data. Based on these theories, I added the following foci to Fairclough's approach to analysis: discussions of race and processes of racialization; issues of normative whiteness; recognition of contributions made by Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people; and anti-essentialism and intersectionality.

Concluding Methodological Thoughts: Reflexive Turns and Going Forward

CDA shows particular strengths in relation not only to the topic of this research, but also clearly aligns with the theoretical foundations put forth. In addition, it is also consistent with my own critical epistemological frame. Wodak and Meyer (2009) write that a key feature of CDA is the importance of the researcher's positionality and reflexivity throughout the process. As previously mentioned, coming to this topic was a journey that required me to question my positionality and reflect on my uncritical engagement with the field of Fat studies. Though the field is doing important work, engaging with its literature revealed that whiteness has gone largely unquestioned. Though I intended to continue with my original topic at the beginning of this revelation, I struggled with its existence - it was like a song that gets stuck in your head and refuses to leave until you do something about it. It is also not lost on me that I am yet another white woman contributing to the Fat studies literature. Though what is needed is the critical centring of whiteness and issues of race, as well as systemic support for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized scholars' work, I am hoping that this piece of research will add to the literature that calls attention to this legacy of whiteness in hopes that the calls will soon be too loud to ignore.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This section will outline the discursive trends, patterns, and statements that are apparent in both their existence and non-existence. I begin with understandings from the generality of each of the readers as a whole, including their titles, cover images, tables of contents and scholars, as well as some key search terms grounded in theoretical understandings. Following these discussions, I outline the functioning of dominant discourses as whiteness is operationalized through invisibility and normalization, as well as counter-discourses as whiteness is named and de-normed in six chapters from each reader. I end this section off by summarizing my findings and coming back to my research questions.

For the purposes of clarity, throughout this section, chapters will be referenced not by (author name, year published, page number), but rather by (author name, *reader title*, page number). The reader titles will be shortened accordingly (FSR for *The Fat Studies Reader*, and TF for *Thickening Fat*). All chapters selected as texts have been outlined in the *Methodology* chapter of this MRP (p. 28).

Generalities: Beginnings of Discursivity “by the Cover”

Though I initially felt I needed to focus only on the specific texts that I had chosen from each reader, my reactions as I engaged with the general features of the readers reinforced the idea that anything can be a text with CDA. This understanding was made more apparent by the ways in which these general features aligned with the specific discursive discussions happening within the specific texts I chose for analysis (all of which will be explicated in the following sections). The general features I engaged with include the titles, table of contents, scholars, the frequency of some key theoretically-informed terms, as well as the cover images of each reader.

For those who engage with these two readers, their titles are most likely the first point of contact. Especially within the current context, in which the global pandemic has precluded the possibility (in many circumstances) to physically engage with texts via their cover or by flipping through them. For the many people that are beginning to engage with critical theories and writings in the time of COVID-19 as well as the mass (and continuing) protests for Black Lives Matter, recommendations often come in the form of

blog posts, Twitter threads, and Reddit posts that list simply the title and authors of the work (and in circumstances where there is no character limit, a small summary). These pandemic-based shifts, along with the information-overload of social media and the internet world, mean that the title of a work can draw reader engagement, but also may realistically be the only engagement with the work. As such, I feel that the titles of these readers are important to discuss: they act as a microcosm to the content within and its underlying assumptions. *The Fat Studies Reader* as a title positions this reader as *the* essential reading for fat studies, implying that it contains the foundational texts for an introduction to the field¹⁰. It functions in similar ways to its European counterpart, *Fat Studies in the UK* (Tomrley & Kaloski Naylor, 2009), in which its contents are established as credible and true as *the* source on fat studies, and by extension, enables a claim on the story and foundation of fat studies. Contrarily, *Thickening Fat: Fat Bodies, Intersectionality, and Social Justice* titles the other reader in intentional ways. Divesting from this singularizing discourse, this reader leaves space for broader possibilities by attempting to “thicken fat by understanding the ways that fat identities and embodiments are neither singular nor static” (Rinaldi et al., TF, p. 2). By intentionally naming “intersectionality” in the title, it makes clear the editors’ intentions and the nature of the content within: it is something, then, that *must* be examined in each chapter. The inclusion of “social justice” also makes clear the editors’ intentions: it attempts to extend theorizing beyond the academy and into the realm of action and change.

The discursive underpinnings of each title point to wider trends in their respective readers, which can be further seen through their tables of contents and the scholars writing in each. When looking at the former, I looked for theoretically informed functionings of whiteness: I found that individualism¹¹ was especially apparent. 30 of 42 (71%) chapters in *The Fat Studies Reader* have one author listed, with a majority of group-authored chapters (9 of 12, or 75%) written by pairs. *Thickening Fat* has individual

¹⁰ This is not to discount, however, that at the time, this reader was one of the first widely published collections around fat studies.

¹¹ Refer to *Theoretical Frameworks* (citation on p. 16). More specifically, individualism supports whiteness through the creation of competition, through which individuals are forced to seek more recognition than others to secure their position within a hierarchy (Jones & Okun, 2001).

authors listed for 14 of 21 (66%) chapters, with a majority of group-authored chapters (4 of 7, or 57%) written by pairs. The fact that a significant majority of chapters were written individually in both readers shows that academia continues to stoke individualism (indeed, this very paper is an example of the privileging of individual work over collaborative efforts), and by extension, upholds whiteness in practice. I also wonder whose words and which members of discussion may have been subsumed under the individual-authored work in ways that cannot simply be captured by an APA-style reference at the end of a chapter¹².

The listed authors of each chapter speak to the ways in which academia has and continues to be a space that upholds whiteness, even as calls for ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ in the decade between these two readers, and the year between the publishing of the most recent one and the writing of this paper. In looking at the contributing authors, I attempted to look at the ways they self-identified towards representation, which was much more apparent in *Thickening Fat* whether that was within their chapter, their short biography, or other works they have published. In cases where this was not possible, much more so in *The Fat Studies Reader*, I attempted to look at representation in terms of whether authors were white-passing. My intent was not to deny people’s unique histories and journeys, but rather to attend to the ways that racism and shadeism impact representation in academia. To that end, 46 of 54 (85%) of authors were white-passing in *The Fat Studies Reader*, while 19 of 28 (68%) of authors were white-passing in *Thickening Fat*. This is not to say, however, that people who are white-passing (especially those who *are* white) are not able to engage in meaningful dialogue with race. Rather, each piece of research originates from a particular standpoint, and those of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people (especially when articulated by themselves) continue to be marginalized. If fat studies is truly a liberatory field, it *must* advocate for the scholarship of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people in ways that

¹² While holding these understandings as true, I also want to reiterate that it is not my intention to call out individual authors (or individual-authored works in this case), because both of these readers are published in context of academia, in which individual recognition is not only celebrated, but needed to secure their position as scholars. This necessity is even more important for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized scholars, whose abilities and knowledge are questioned from their first engagements with academia.

allow them to speak to their experiences in an embodied way (a way which aligns with the values of the field itself).

Because whiteness thrives when it remains unnamed and unexamined, I thought that looking at the frequency of some key theoretically informed terms might be helpful to look at how this ‘unexamined-ness’ is operationalized in each reader. The terms I searched included: “whiteness”, “white supremacy”, “intersectionality” (as well as “intersect”, “intersects”, “intersectional”, and “intersectionally”), “essentialism” (as well as “essentialize”, and “essentialist”), “race”, and “racialization” (as well as “racialized” and “racializing”)¹³. Of particular note, there are only 7 uses of “whiteness” in *The Fat Studies Reader*: 2 of which occur in chapters that explicitly position issues of race throughout. The other 5 are in a single chapter that only adds whiteness into their analysis towards the end without critical engagement and connection to their topic (Hetrick & Attig, FSR). The term “white supremacy” is alluded to only once in this reader through the invocation of “European supremacy”, within a chapter that discusses the American colonization of Indigenous, Hispanic people in relation to food and fatness (McCrossin, 2009, p. 247). It is clear that discussions around whiteness and white supremacy only happen in specific spaces unless, like in *Thickening Fat*, there is a specific and stated intention to do so. Though *Thickening Fat* had higher frequencies of each search term, both readers had low returns around “essentialism” and its related terms. I wonder if discussions around (anti-)essentialism are subsumed around calls for intersectionality, or perhaps, that anti-essentialism is presumed when advocating for intersectional approaches.

The implications of each readers’ cover image not only follow and extend these discursive trends, but also serve to operationalize them visually. The cover image of *The Fat Studies Reader* (Appendix A) includes four people holding hands: two of which appear to be typically female-presenting, and two

¹³ I left out terms returned that were part of other words that were irrelevant to the meaning of the term, such as “trace” or “embrace”, as well as those returned outside of the chapters’ text (including references, indices, and front matter prior to the introduction). What this list does not take into account, however, are mentions of Black, Indigenous, or Racialized people mentioned specifically, such as E-K Daufin’s chapter in *Thickening Fat* focusing on Black women, intersectionality, and weight stigma (2019, p. 160).

appear typically male-presenting. Similarly, two of the people look white-passing, while the other two are Black and Brown. The latter, to me, almost feels like posturing towards progressiveness, as it is clear that Black, Indigenous, and Racialized scholars, lived experiences, and issues are not represented in this equal way. In other words, the cover image is not congruent with the writing contained within the covers. In contrast, the cover image of *Thickening Fat* (Appendix B), is line art of a fat body, though any other identifying markers are not apparent. This ambiguity falls in line with the editors' intent to challenge dominant conceptualizations of fat identities (Rinaldi et al., TF, p. 9). Along with the title, cover images make important statements about the contents within. In the case of the former, the image follows trends that are beginning to take shape: posturing towards equal representation while it is clear that this is not the case secures progressive credibility for the reader without having to do the work that comes with representational justice. In this way, whiteness remains not only unchallenged, but is actively supported and mechanized to appear progressive. In the case of the latter, the image's ambiguity encourages space for broader possibilities in the field, which, in concert with this reader's commitment to critical intersectionality, means that the normativity of whiteness is more often named and challenged.

The general features of each reader point to important trends in the field of fat studies that are further developed throughout the specific chapters I have chosen as my texts for analysis. The next section will build on the ways that these readers discursively engage with whiteness, beginning with some logistical and methodological insights and continuing with key discursive conversations that can be traced between the two.

Reading and Coding: Beginnings of Analysis

Each chapter was reviewed three times during the course of analysis. The first read was for general reading comprehension, accompanied by a pencil to underline or highlight themes that stuck out, as well as a brief summary of these on a separate document. From these brief summaries, I was able to pick out some key themes that repeatedly emerged in each reader. The second read, then, built on these key themes with some tentative "coding", four of which identified for each reader, demarcated through

highlighting and sticky notes in the readers themselves. Codes in *The Fat Studies Reader* included “origins of the field”, “empty mentions”, “discursive power-plays”, and “whiteness operationalized/in practice”, while those for *Thickening Fat* included “de-norming, naming, and indicting whiteness”, “anti-essentialism and intersectionality”, “challenges to the pillars of whiteness”, and “challenging a deficit/pathologizing focus”. Though these codes are valuable for understanding, what became apparent was the existence of intertextual conversations within which these codes (and specific concepts within them) not only illustrated the ways that whiteness functions, but also provided counter-discourses that de-normed these functionalities. Therefore, the third read, which happened as I “digitized” my findings, attempted to capture these intertextual conversations and the ways in which chapters from each reader aligned in intentional ways. My findings will be presented through the codes that I devised in my second read, but where possible, will include these discursive conversations.

Origins of and contributions to the field: “Origin stories set the terms”¹⁴

Discussions of the origins of the field of fat studies were present in both readers, and though they were approached in distinct ways, they speak to similar processes of appropriation, marginalization, and naturalization that have established the field of fat studies and activism largely as “white, US fat feminism” (Farrell, TF, p. 30). In *The Fat Studies Reader*, words like “new”, “began”, “nascent”, and “starting” (Wann, FSR, p. ix, xi, x) are frequently used to describe fat studies. Indeed, in 2009 when this reader was published, fat studies as an academic field was on the uptake, receiving more attention in academic and research circles. This uptake, however, is positioned within the context of professionalism and science: though fat studies “offers a crucial corollary to fat pride community and fat civil rights activism” (Wann, FSR, p. x), the academic field is distanced from its activism sibling. Solovay and Rothblum (FSR) write:

Fat studies requires approaching the construction of fat and fatness with a critical methodology—the same sort of progressive, **systematic academic rigour** with which we approach negative attitudes and stereotypes about women, queer people, and racial groups. (p. 2)

¹⁴ Farrell, TF, p. 29

Though it is clear that the intention behind these words is to show that fat bodies are worthy of theorizing in the same way that other bodies and identities are, they make a clear statement on what is academic and what is not in the field of fat studies. By positioning the criteria of “systematic academic rigour” in front of fat studies, it sets the framework for what is systematic, what is academic, and what is rigorous: each of which is closely rooted to notions of whiteness around the privileging of quantitative research values even in qualitative research. It evokes discussions of objectivity, reliability, replicability, and so on, which are incongruent with the goal of fat studies analysis: to “keep the actual lives of fat people at the heart of analysis” (Solovay & Rothblum, FSR, p. 2), as fat bodies and fat oppression are both denied. In doing so, there is a shift away from the very activism that made fat studies as a field possible in the first place, and towards notions of professionalism. Lind (TF) notes that this divestment from activism and investment in academia stifles the radical nature of the former and waters-down its advocacy:

One marker of class distinction [through which “whiteness comes into visibility” (p. 190)] is when activists gain credentialized entry into professional fields. In her important and comprehensive survey of fat activism, Charlotte Cooper argues that social movements can become “gentrified” when they gain access to professionalized power structures. For Cooper, changing the name of “Fat Studies” to “Critical Weight Studies” is an example of “whitewashing.” Cooper (2016) argues that **when professional standards gentrify otherwise radical movements what becomes erased is “a powerful fat activist voice [associated] with the impolite, the unrefined, the distasteful and the unclassy”** (p. 176). (p. 191).

In doing so, not only does activism fall to the wayside of academic advances, but its value is diminished. When activism is not seen as rigorous and/or theoretically-informed, it is able to be dismissed in ways that privilege a scholarly voice over an activist voice. Even something as seemingly miniscule as deeming fat studies a “field of intellectual inquiry” carries these assumptions about the value of academic knowledge. An example of this is apparent in those who are cited as foundational scholars who took up fat studies individually before its organization into an academic field, including an “anthropologist”, a “medical anthropologist”, and people in the field of “law” (Wann, FSR, p. x-xi). Three things are of note here: (1) that the individuals are all at least white-passing, (2) that each of these fields have had violent histories and presences in the lives of those who are Black, Indigenous, and Racialized, and (3) that they are all professionalized and/or academics. I contend, however, that activism is scholarly, and that if so,

there should be many more names on this list. This academia-activist hierarchy is magnified even more so by the privileging of the written word over the speech or visual representations, which itself upholds whiteness by devaluing oral and audio-visual knowledge sharing.¹⁵

In concert with the academia-activism divide, race emerged as a telling part of these origin stories that establish fat studies as it is today. Farrell (TF) notes that the origin story that has been relayed in fat studies literature (as well as earlier in this paper) is problematic in that it ignores the foundational activism of, in this case, Black fat people. She writes:

But this origin story also constitutes a serious problem. Even with the caveat that often precedes its telling (“this is only one of the stories”) **the frequency with which this origin story is repeated means it is becoming more entrenched, situating fat activism as a largely US, white, lesbian movement.** Its repetition flattens fat, erasing complexity and contradiction, ignoring other voices, many of whom do not necessarily see fat as the crisis area, but rather as one crisis area out of many. ... A very important genealogy of Fat Studies and fat activism that disappears in this dominant story is **that of Black writers, activists, and artists who have articulated a “thickened” fat activism from the origins of fat liberation.** (p. 31)

Black fat activism in particular has been crucial to fat rights, fat positivity, fat pride, and by extension theorizing fatness especially at its intersections. However, it often is subsumed by whiteness in practice, which positions their work at the peripheral. Indeed, during the writing of this paper, it was extremely difficult to find historical examples of “non-white”¹⁶ fat activists - even Google searching ‘fat activism’ returns mostly white activism located in the United States. The single-story of the origins of the field privileges white activist-scholars voices at the expense of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people who discuss fatness in critical ways as it intersects with other aspects of their experience. Farrell (TF) highlights two such historical activist-scholars, both of which I was only able to find through this chapter that pays specific attention to the work of Black activist-scholars:

¹⁵ This paper, however, is no exception, as many of the references I engage with are scholarly sources, and only after engaging with these texts did I realize that I was perpetuating that which I was attempting to challenge. Following this realization, I endeavoured to find sources that did not rest solely in the scholarly written word, but were themselves academic nonetheless.

¹⁶ “Non-white” is used intentionally in this section with quotations around it to highlight the ways in which whiteness absorbs Black, Indigenous, and Racialized bodies, voices, and experiences, which all then effectively become “non-white”.

In the 1972 first full issue of *Ms. Magazine*, for instance, the welfare rights organizer **Johnnie Tillmon** wrote, “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. If you’re any one of those things, you count less as a person. If you’re all of those things, you just don’t count, except as a statistic” (1972, p. 111). ... Guyanese-British poet **Grace Nichols’** 1984 *Fat Black Woman’s Poems* lovingly evokes the ways that “beauty is a black fat woman” (p. 7), a being of explicit and enticing sexuality, as she writes in “Invitation”. ... This explicit sexual invitation, however, contrasts sharply with her political jab in “The Black Fat Woman Remembers”: “This black fat woman ain’t no Jemima” (p. 9). (p. 31)

Johnnie Tillmon includes fatness as it intersects with the various other identity markers she holds, which speaks the ways in which patriarchy, whiteness, and capitalism all have bearing on the way that fatness functions. Grace Nichols speaks to the way that Black fat womanhood is constructed by whiteness, inextricably linking it to the theorizing of fatness. These and other fat activist-scholars (as well as their foundational contributions) are obscured through the common telling of fat studies’ origins, and participates in the appropriation of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized voices towards the progress of white academia. Even when they are allowed space in academia, they continue to be censured by standards rooted in whiteness. Senyonga (TF) focuses this discussion around academia’s positioning as liberatory, while in reality, this generally is not the case:

I consider how the pursuit of higher education has been positioned as a means of acquiring material gain in the face of redressing racism, sexism, and other such structures of domination. **The pursuit of higher education, however, mandates that individuals operate under set limitations.** Bodies that are disciplined and legible as white, thin, cisgender, heterosexual, able, and other **privileged positionalities are set as the standard by which we are all judged and afforded agency.** (p. 220)

Locating fat studies within academia, a space that is imbued with whiteness that manifests through both policy and practice, further reduces the space for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized voices and experiences to be put forth, especially as articulated by themselves. Because these voices and experiences fall outside of the privileged positionalities that Senyonga sets out, they are less likely to be told in authentic ways, if at all. Such is clear in the field of fat studies, as Rinaldi and colleagues (TF) note that:

The normative subject of the field still tends to be a **young(ish), white, cisgender woman**, and typically one who is **from the Global North**. Fat activist spaces, too, tend to materialize as **white, middle-class** spaces. (p. 2)

Even now, with the work being done to integrate critical intersectionality into fat studies, discussions of fatness as it intersects with race, gender expression and identity, (dis)ability, socioeconomic class, geopolitical location, and many other markers of identity continue to be marginalized. This marginalization has real-world implications as well: if Black, Indigenous, and Racialized voices are not part of the discussion (especially when they are presented by Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people themselves), they are not available for referencing when advocating for changes to policy and practice that will allow for challenging fat oppression. Any changes, then, will continue to be based on white bodies (or white conceptualizations of “non-white” bodies) and applied in an essentializing way to all fat bodies.

Impacts of origin stories and representational injustice: A form of intellectual colonization

All of the examples presented in the previous section, I think, boil down to a kind of intellectual colonization by which Black, Indigenous, and Racialized voices, experiences, and bodies are essentially erased, unless they are recounted by a white voice that sanitizes them through codes of whiteness. By positioning fat studies as academic and rigorous, which then privileges the written word as a ‘scholarly’ source, fat theorizing is allowed to be gate-kept into what is scholarly and what is not. To be clear, it is the fact that academia privileges white ways of being, knowing, and doing that is problematic here. Compounded by the reality that it is mostly white(-passing) scholars that are given opportunities to write, Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people theorizing about fatness are erased in scholarship, contributions, and even as participants in research endeavours. What results, then, is mostly white (passing) authors given license to speak about ‘Others’ and claim scholarly merit through appropriation of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized voices and experience. One such example can be found in the “Foreword” of *The Fat Studies Reader*, in which Wann (FSR) writes:

In 1974, not long after the Fat Underground staged a takeover of the stage at a major women’s rally to protest ugly rumors about popular singer (and fat woman) Cass Elliot’s death, this quote appeared in the majority finding of the California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District, case involving the **Black Panthers**: “Textual analysis is not enough” (Black Panther Party v. Kehoe, 1974, p. 651). **Fat studies texts need to connect with the reality of weight discrimination.** (p. xviii)

Wann's point here, indeed, is meaningful - that fat studies *must* ground itself in the real-world experiences of fat people. And, yes, textual analysis is not enough when it comes to people's lives. However, to invoke the long history of the Black Panther movement and not mention race unless otherwise in a laundry list of other identity markers, feels odd. It is an emptying of the history of the fight for Black people's rights (that is continuing today) - a sanitized tagline used to make a point. This emptying is also evident in the exclusion of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat activist-scholars' contributions to the field. And again, when they are included, their work is 'colonized' in ways that devalue their contributions and mark them as other. An excerpt from Levy-Navarro's (FSR) work illustrates this clearly:

As **Sander Gilman** explains, nineteenth-century racialized discourse distinguished between the type of the Jew and non-Jew by the "fact" that the former was fat (Gilman, 2004, p. 49). **Hillel Schwartz** suggests a similar relationship in *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat* (1986). Widespread fear of "obesity" coincided in the United States with a cultural anxiety over the influx of immigrant groups, especially Italians and Jews (Schwartz, 1986, p. 143). ... As **one Latina writer** observes, she lives in two worlds with two very different understandings of her "fat" body. Where the one would insist that she is "obese," the other understands her to be "bien cuidada" or well-cared for (**Haubegger, 2000, p. 242; Levy-Navarro, 2005**). (p. 16)

The two Jewish, but white-passing, male scholars are mentioned by full name, while the female, Latina author is only mentioned by her identity as a "Latina writer". Furthermore, the first two authors are supported only by their own work, however the last author's narrative has been subsumed under an additional reference to support her claims. This excerpt not only reinforces the privileging of scholarly sources (of which personal narratives are not), but also exhibits the same emptying consistent with intellectual colonization.

The existence and functioning of intellectual colonization renders whiteness invisible in the field of fat studies by 'emptying out' the voices and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized activists, scholars, and people as a whole. There is promise, however, in collections like *Thickening Fat* that attempt to privilege discussions of whiteness and race (even when they are not the main topics of chapters) and intentionally open space for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized activist-scholars to speak to their experiences with fat in ways that are fulfilling rather than emptying. Nonetheless, it is clear that

neither reader is perfect when considering the analysis in the *Generalities* section of this paper, and points to the reality that there will always be work that needs to be done to ensure that intellectual colonization is indicted, and for change to happen.

Empty mentions & discursive power-plays: “The white silences lingered uncomfortably”¹⁷

A distinct divergence between the two readers included their engagement (or lack thereof) with issues of race and whiteness. Although there were some chapters in *The Fat Studies Reader* that named and engaged with these concepts in critical and meaningful ways, a majority of the texts did not. Rather, there were two tendencies that emerged: the first was a large number of empty mentions of racism, colonialism, and other oppressive forces, as well as critical concepts such as intersectionality. These took the form of only mentioning race in a list of other intersectional identities without engaging with it, or mentioning things like whiteness but not integrating them into their analysis in engaged ways. For example, Solovay and Rothblum (FSR) write about the Fat Underground’s authoring of “The Fat Liberation Manifesto” in 1973:

In that work, they stated that fat people are fully deserving of human respect, demanded equal rights for fat people, and **viewed the struggle to end fat oppression “as allied with the struggles of other oppressed groups against classism, racism, sexism, ageism, financial exploitation, imperialism and the like”** (Freespirit & Aldebaran, 1973). (p. 4)

Each of the three statements here are true and valuable to not only the field of fat studies, but to society as a whole as a way to challenge dominant conceptions of fatness. However, except for several chapters that explicitly position some of these oppressions at their centre, the remaining majority of the reader does *not* align issues of fatness with other oppressions. It is also worth noting that the oppressions mentioned are positioned in mutually exclusive ways through the wording of “other oppressed groups” and their struggles, setting itself apart from them even as they are allied.

Perhaps the most striking example, however, of these empty mentions is the opening statement of *The Fat Studies Reader*, in which Wann (FSR) includes a quote that reads:

‘You’ll learn things you never knew you never knew.’

¹⁷ Lind, TF, p. 183

- Lyrics from *Pocahontas*, **an anticolonialist movie that contains unexamined colonialism** (Menken & Schwartz, 1995). (p. ix)

Though this quote could apply if thinking about fatness outside of weight-based health paradigms is new to a reader, it is the referencing after that struck me. First, discussions about colonialism are not taken up in this chapter, nor are they taken up in meaningful ways throughout the reader except in two chapters that explicitly place race and whiteness at their centre. This quote, with its referencing, is simply placed at the fore of the reader without any sort of discussion, and thereby becomes one of many empty mentions.

As an aside, I am not implying here that *Pocahontas* has no bearing in discussions of fatness. In fact, Robinson (TF) notes that the representation of Pocahontas, especially in comparison to oppositional stereotypes of excessiveness, play a part in reinforcing and justifying violence towards Indigenous women:

The most familiar “Indian Princess” is Pocahontas, who rescues Captain John Smith from death and befriends colonists at Jamestown, in what is currently Virginia. ... By the time we get to Walt Disney Pictures’ 1995 animated film *Pocahontas*, the flirtatious “Princess” is as slender as Barbie. **Muscogee scholar Dwanna Lynn Robertson notes the racist binary of “sexy maiden” and “dirty squaw” promotes “the idea that Indigenous women are highly sexualized, act wild, like to be held captive, and become sexually active at earlier ages than other racial groups of women” (2013, p. 53).** Such representations mark Indigenous women’s bodies as targets for sexual aggression, justifying the rape of bodies and lands as a civilizing practice. (p. 20)

The dichotomy between the fatness and excessiveness of the second half of the binary (which, through the colonial gaze, begs to be ‘fixed’) in relation to the thinness and conformity of the first half (which, through the colonial gaze, is the proper role) shows that fatness is bound up in complex ways to anti-Indigenous racism, colonialism, and sexism, which has concrete, harmful effects on fat, Indigenous women’s lives. Going back to the first quote, it feels almost ironic that this reader opens with a quote that, after analysis, essentially describes itself. Fat studies’ stated goal is to challenge fat oppression and provide liberatory pathways for all fat people, yet the inherent whiteness that, though being increasingly challenged and rejected, permeates the field precludes it from reaching the goal of “fat liberation for all” by not attending to fat issues as they intersect with other oppressions. In other words, fat oppression does not stand alone as an oppressive force, but rather interacts with whiteness and other dominant identity

markers in nuanced ways. So, as a riff on the referencing in this quote: fat studies is a field with a focus on anti-fat oppression that does not challenge fat oppression for all. Another example of empty mentions can be found in the chapter authored by Royce (FSR) that takes on the intersections of fat oppression and the experience of intimate partner violence, who writes:

Historically, **legal, religious, medical, and social institutions have been complicit in the abuse of battered women in a variety of ways**, ultimately displacing blame for the abuse from perpetrators on to victims (Herman, 1997; Jones, 2000). (*p. 152*)

This statement is true and is evidence of a long history of institutional violence against women. However, this statement is also true and takes on a more nuanced meaning if a race-based analysis is integrated, specifically around the ways in which racism, colonialism, and sexism are institutionalized. Robinson (TF) speaks to the existence of these dominating dynamics by looking at the ways in which media representations, explorer's diaries and discussions about Turtle Island's 'discovery', societal stereotypes, and public health campaigns all contribute to the ways in which colonialism/sexism are institutionalized in ways that justify violence to Indigenous women. Simply saying that these systems are complicit in violence against women "in a variety of ways" is not enough, but that is where this chapter stops.

The second tendency that emerged consisted of discursive power-plays, in which blanket statements, bound by whiteness, were universally applied without considering the very real implications for anyone who is "non-white". For example, Levy-Navarro (FSR) posits that to challenge anti-fatness, there is a need for queer time to draw away from the emphasis on the 'before' and the 'after' that often permeate discussions of fatness in the media:

The imagination creates multiple times, and in so doing, offers multiple, queer relations between the supposed past and the present. Neither the present nor the past can ever be singularly or only an "after" or a "before" because we continue to forge new relations between the past and the present. **Our fat histories need to occupy times that go athwart of or across the linear time of cause and effect that is currently used to oppress us.** (*p. 19*)

Indeed, fat bodies in the media are often presented through before and after images that reinforce that it is not acceptable to simply *be* in a fat body, but rather that fat bodies are impermanent and must be in a process of becoming thin. However, the focus on time here is virtually irrelevant when considering Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people: regardless of where they are situated on the before/after/now scale,

non-white bodies can never achieve the ‘after’, or even the ‘now’, because even if people *were* allowed to live in fat bodies in life-affirming and positive ways, fat Black, Indigenous, and Racialized bodies are *still* set apart through mechanisms of racism, colonialism, orientalism, and so on. The blanketing of this de-linearity of time as a pathway to ending fat oppression (which may work for white bodies who, by being accepted in their fatness, can be seen as ‘whole’) does not work for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people. Another example can be found in the chapter written by Giovanelli and Ostertag (FSR), who speak to media representations of fat female characters:

Fat female television characters are both **numerically annihilated** (in that the major networks cast only two fat female characters for their prime-time television programming) and **qualitatively annihilated** (in that their characters’ performances and persona are devoid of any sexual and romantic desirability or interest). In two programs saturated with sexual references and innuendos, Berta’s character **evades any suggestions that she is even interested in sex, let alone that she is sexually stimulating**, and Katrina’s **lack of sexual and romantic desirability** [as a fat female] serves to reinforce and validate Skylar’s dominant sexuality [as thin]. **Both women are denied their sexuality and at times are romantically humiliated in front of millions of viewers each week.** (p. 293)¹⁸

Indeed, Giovanelli and Ostertag (FSR) are correct in noting the power of media representation in the perpetuation of fatphobia. What is missed here, is the fact that both shows are extremely white in their on-screen representation, yet this whiteness is never mentioned by the authors. It is also striking that the characters they do mention parallel racial stereotypes of the ‘Mammy’ for Berta (who is highly desexualized and exists only to serve), and a form of the ‘oppositional Black other’ for Katrina (whose disgusting qualities exist only to highlight the ‘goodness’ of thin), both articulated by Senyonga (TF). Though this chapter is challenging the symbolic annihilation of fat female characters, they are also perpetuating the symbolic annihilation of ‘non-white’ fat female characters. By omitting mentions of all-white representation, even though it clearly pulls from the assumptions of racist, fatphobic stereotypes, this chapter absolves itself of the necessity to mention whiteness at all. There were multiple other examples of using obviously racially coded language without attention to their racial implications. Examples include: “desks not only divide and **police** spatial boundaries, but they also teach students to

¹⁸ The characters referred to are from *Two and a Half Men* (Berta) and *Stacked* (Katrina & Skylar).

police themselves” (Hetrick & Attig, FSR, p. 200), “to be fat was to the ruling elite to be **vicious, common, and unlearned**” (Levy-Navarro, FSR, p. 20), and “along with the knowledge created in the classroom, we carry **welts and marks** on our hips and stomachs **where discipline has been practiced on our bodies**” (Hetrick & Attig, FSR, p. 204). Mentions of policing parallel racism (particularly anti-Black racism), of viciousness and a lack of intellectuality parallel colonialism and the domination of bodies, and of marks on bodies as a result of discipline parallel the violence of slavery and genocide. Yet, these clear parallels are not drawn: a discursive power-play that uses the ‘emptying’ power of whiteness to harness the violence and suffering behind these words to make their point. Another example of discursive power-plays can be seen through the recounting of a fat student’s activism in Hetrick and Attig (FSR) in which she rejects the too-small desks that mark fat bodies as deviant:

Rose Robertson, a student at Beloit College, suggests through her actions a less circuitous route to resistance. A fat woman, Rose cannot sit comfortably in the desks that her school provides. **When she enters a classroom where only desks are available, she unsightly plunks herself down on the floor. This action often disrupts class and draws unapologetic attention to the desks’ failure to fit her body.** She participates in class but does so from the floor, forcing both professor and fellow students to crane their necks to see her and acknowledge both her difference as well as her blatant refusal to squeeze herself into the classroom desk and endure its attendant pain and discomfort. (p. 203)

Though Rose’s race is not mentioned here, when I read this excerpt, I read her as white: white people do not tend to identify themselves (or other white people) as white, even if they in the same sentence identify Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people by their race. Nonetheless, by strategically not mentioning race, this form of activism is presented as a blanket possibility for challenging the fatphobic messages in the too-small desk. This very public and often disruptive action, though potentially safe for white fat students, may very well be life-threatening, if not life-ending, if the fat student resisting is Black, Indigenous, or Racialized. Though I spoke in parallels in the previous example, there is *no* parallel here: white people’s resistance is not treated with the same assumptions of criminality, dangerousness, and disruptiveness that Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people’s resistance are subject to (regardless of their approach). I think back to more historical movements led by Black, Indigenous, or Racialized people, such as Idle No More or the 1990 Siege of Kanehsatà:ke and Kahnawake, and the ways in which resistance and resilience in

who have been raced are categorized as dangerous, criminal, and overly emotional. I think about the historical and ongoing resistance being made by Indigenous people across Turtle Island, such as the people of the Wet'suwet'en Nation who have been holding the Gidimt'en Access Checkpoint, who have been criminalized and killed by the RCMP for claiming their right to the land. I think about the current Black Lives Matter protests, and all the protestors (peaceful or not) who have experienced violence as a result of these categorizations and have suffered injuries or even death for asking for an end to police brutality (among other important calls to action). I also think about white supremacist, arms-bearing groups that are being allowed to open carry and make threats on people's lives, but are constructed as safe people who are just exercising their rights. The point I am making here, then, is that resistive acts, as well as the consequences of resistance, often lead to the perpetuation of violence onto Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people's bodies. Participating in public and disruptive resistance may not be something that 'non-white' people can do safely, especially if they hold other marginalized identities, but by universalizing these acts as a resistive pathway, these realities do not get taken up and allow assumptions rooted in whiteness to question and demonize the resistance of 'non-white' people.

Impacts of empty mentions and discursive power-plays: Posturing towards 'progressive cred'

What I think this culminates in is posturing, in which fat studies scholars are able to convey a progressive and intersectional stance (through empty mentions), while also allowing them to avoid the work needed to do so critically (through discursive power-plays). When recounting an event called "The Queerness of Fat Activism" in 2012, Lind (TF) writes:

Each panellist of colour situated their experiences of fatphobia within a broader discussion of racialization, while the white participants described fatphobia in seemingly race-neutral terms. ... There were many anti-racist statements shared throughout the evening to choruses of nodding heads. My point is that **race was framed as something that happens to bodies of colour, rather than a system of power informing the lives of everyone in the room.** When it came to exploring how whiteness impacted experiences of fatphobia and fat activism in queer contexts, it was clear the **white folks didn't quite know what to say.** (p. 183-184)

Empty mentions of (anti-)racism, along with the mechanization of discursive power-plays that allowed for these silences and uncertainties, function to allow (white) activist-scholars the ability to appear

progressive without a critical interrogation of whiteness. However, for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people, fatness is inextricably linked to processes of racialization, and therefore *requires* critical engagement with whiteness to discuss the unique and complex forms of fat oppression they face. Not only does posturing allow for perpetuation of the representational injustice spoken about in a previous section, but also feeds into the reproduction of the essential fat identity as one that is inherently white.

Self-inserts and challenging the pillars of whiteness: “The ‘tyranny’ of experience”¹⁹

One thing that I found was common in *Thickening Fat* that I did not see in *The Fat Studies Reader* was the use of self-identification to challenge notions of objectivity and neutrality (both of which are identified as pillars that uphold whiteness in my section on theory). This discussion became increasingly important as I realized it challenged discourses of professionalism, as well as the ability to simply appear progressive. Rather than taking away from the academic rigour of the chapter, I found that self-inserts in chapters encouraged critical engagement with race and whiteness, while allowing for additional sources to support the arguments being made.

Embodiment is the topic of key discussions throughout fat studies and is a theme across the two readers. However, the way it is approached differs slightly. Wann (FSR) writes that “**claiming one’s embodiment** (whatever one weighs) **is a form of political resistance**, a way to undo alienation” (p. xv). This, indeed, is true, and has been a tactic used across numerous movements that challenge oppression. However, in her chapter, Wann does not claim her embodiment in ways beyond fatness. She does not self-identify or discuss other aspects of her positionality in relation to fatness, and the ways in which her positionality may change how her fat body is taken up. Taken in comparison to the ways that Senyonga (TF) claims her embodiment in her chapter:

While students may enter the classroom expecting a white, male, thin person as instructor, or even a thin person of colour, **I use my body as a place of knowing to disrupt this expectation**. I wear clothing that does not seek to conceal my fatness or feed into the confines of professionalization, but rather highlights my body’s presence. **I take my embodied experiences and identities as examples to engage my students in critical reflection**. In my pedagogy,

¹⁹ Hetrick & Attig, FSR, p. 197

research agenda, and overall liberatory vision I aim to think critically through what it means to have an intersectional praxis and not just posture towards one. (p. 222-223)

Senyonga very clearly claims her embodiment, self-identifies, and speaks to the complex ways that her many identities, as Black, fat, queer, and femme, all contribute to how her body is taken up in the world. Further, she discusses how her embodiment and the experiences that come with it allow her to engage in critical, intersectional ways with fat studies and its pedagogy. As I read these two examples, I cannot help but think of Lind's work discussed above, in which white activist-scholars positioned their fat experiences in race-neutral ways, while Black, Indigenous, and Racialized activist-scholars located their fat experiences within "a broader discussion of racialization" (TF, p. 183). In addition to this key distinction, Wann's words seem somewhat detached from the intention behind them: I wonder if this falls in line with the discourses of professionalization in fat studies at the time that privileged academic standards of work, including objectivity, neutrality, and perfectionism. I would argue, however, that though Senyonga's words defy these principles, the articulation of her embodiment is not only more 'fleshed out' and accessible, but is also *more* rigorous than any neutral claims: she explains clearly why her embodiment matters to the way she walks in the world, as well as how she engages with her embodied experiences within a context of fat studies. Another example of this rigorous self-identification can be found in the chapter written by Robinson (TF). She opens the chapter by identifying herself in relation to fatness:

As a fledgling professor, **I worry how my fat impacts my ability to obtain a tenure-track position in Mi'kmaki, the traditional territory of my people, the Mi'kmaq**, on what is currently Canada's eastern seaboard. ... As a **queer woman whose Indigeneity already evokes negative stereotypes**, I worry my intersecting identities stretch the boundaries of academic collegiality too far, as my chest stretches the blazer that fit me last summer. So I control what I eat, skip meals, and walk to work and back, **but feel complicit in shaping my body to meet colonial standards beyond my reach**. (p. 15)

Like Senyonga, Robinson speaks to the ways in which her varying and intersecting identities shape how she walks in the world, and gives readers insight into how this chapter will engage with these complexities. In addition to her self-identification, she further challenges objectivity and neutrality by transparently identifying virtually every scholar she references throughout the work. Some examples include: "Indigenous scholars Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (**Dakota**) and Michael Yellow Bird

(Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) define colonization as...” (p. 16), “settler sociologist Abigail C. Saguy (2013) details how...” (p. 19), and “Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna, Sioux, Pueblo) (1986) details...” (p. 26). By doing so, Robinson is not only able to delineate power relations through the “settler” identifier, but is also able to correctly attribute Indigenous scholars’ words directly to them (and also challenges the misguided notion that all Indigenous people/cultures are the same), thereby resisting intellectual colonization and notions of objectivity.

One instance where this resistance can be seen in *The Fat Studies Reader* can be found in the chapter by Hetrick and Attig (FSR), who write about their experiences sitting in too-small desks::

Though we rely on these experiences of pain to ground and frame our examination, we also take care to resist what could be called the **tyranny of experience**. When the only or primary goal of an activist or academic project is making personal experience visible, Joan Scott writes, “analysis of the workings of this system and of its historicity” is prevented (1992, p. 25). ... Cognizant of Scott’s warning, **we seek to use a consideration of our experiences as fat students as a way of approaching the description and scrutiny of the social, political, and educational conditions of those experiences.** (p. 197)

I had two initial reactions to this quote, specifically the concept of “tyranny of experience”. I wonder if this excerpt speaks to anti-essentialism, even though the wording may not align with intention, by making a statement that outlines these experiences as specific to the two white-passing authors that wrote it. However, this line of thought was only possible because I did external research to identify who was writing these words. Neither Hetrick nor Attig positions themselves in this chapter, and I wonder, why is that so when it is clear that embodiment is of issue here. Is the point of not identifying to prevent the “tyranny of experience”? By not identifying, however, and continuing to use words like “we”, “us”, and “our” (without specifying that those included in these statements are in fact the two authors), doesn’t that position their positioning as the universal and perpetuate the very tyranny they wish to challenge? When looking for answers to these questions, I happened to read work written by Meera (TF), in which she very clearly positions herself, but also equally clearly articulates that though she speaks to key societal structures, they are rooted in her experiences:

The intersection of race and fat is not simplistic and is far more nuanced than this chapter can fully address in its portrayal of a racialized, fat body that embodies these intersecting experiences in varying ways dependent on the social context. ... My own story illustrates the

specific implications of racism and fatphobia in medical discourses, but this is but one site of many that requires a fundamental awareness of race and racism to be fully integrated. (p. 94)

In this excerpt, Meerai resists the “tyranny of experience” that Hetrick and Attig make reference to, and positions her experience as a single instance of a larger, nuanced whole. I wonder if Hetrick and Attig see the merit of self-inserts, but are unable to reconcile that with academia’s standards of objectivity and neutrality. Meerai’s work, as well as work by Senyonga and Robinson among others, show that challenging objectivity and neutrality is not only possible, but is beneficial to the articulation of their arguments.

The necessity of a critical race/intersectional fat studies: “Where course readings fail to surface how fatphobia is tied to imperialist projects, I make these connections”²⁰

Critical race or intersectional approaches to fat studies are not optional. Rather, they are a necessity that derives from not only the pervasiveness of whiteness in the field to date, but also the intimate links between white supremacy in its various forms and fatphobia. After further articulating these linkages, I will present a chapter from each reader that aligns in topic, but diverge in their approach in ways that shift the discussion.

In the introduction to their reader, Rinaldi and colleagues (TF) explicitly make the connection between forms of white supremacy and fatness:

In particular, **white supremacist and settler colonial ideologies racialize fat**, such that the technologies designed to monitor and expunge fat **map onto longstanding anti-Indigenous and racist projects and intentions** (LeBesco, 2004; Poudrier, 2016). When “higher obesity rates” are identified in marginalized groups, medical paradigms provide justification for **discourses of surveillance and expressions of judgment**. That **fatphobia emerges as an acceptable stand-in for racial discrimination** amplifies experiences of exclusion and violence (Wilson, 2009). From the history of the freak show to that of the bell curve, disability scholars have shown **how ableist and racist ideologies overlap and intersect with fatphobic ones through constituting certain bodies as species typical while coding others as aberrant** (Clare, 1999; Garland-Thomson, 1997). (p. 5)

Rinaldi, Rice, and Friedman (TF) rightly invoke the whiteness in dominant biomedical approaches to the justification of increased surveillance and paternalism over Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat bodies.

²⁰ Senyonga, TF, p. 227

Given the power that the medical discourse has over fat bodies, as well as when fat bodies hold other marginalized identities, its collusion with white supremacy *cannot* be ignored. Meerai (TF) also makes this connection, along with the experience of dress shopping in a metaphor that speaks to the harm this surveillance and discipline cause:

Medical discourses construct and mark racialized fat bodies as the deviant Other (Ahmed, 2012; Saeed, 2007). The intersections between my body's outer stylings and inner workings—the dress shop and the doctor's office— reveal **the elaborate interactions between aesthetics, health, representation, size, and risk.** (p. 91)

Senyonga (TF) extends this link with a focus on fat Black femme bodies:

Our contemporary marginalization rests on the substantiation of **thinness as goodness**; the **white supremacist project** of such a position continues to operate in all arenas. (p. 222)

The binary of **white subjects as disciplined and civilized** and **Black people as uninhibited and primal** was bolstered by racial science that purported that Black people acted upon base desires (Strings, 2015). (p. 224)

The Black fat femme body becomes a **visual signifier of difference in comparison to white bodies.** Black fat femme bodies are deeply necessary to the substantiation of dominance. (p. 223)

Senyonga draws particular focus to the ways that white supremacy and anti-Blackness intersect with fatness, though other “non-white” fat bodies follow the same trajectory. It is undeniable, then, that a critical race/intersectional approach *must* be integrated into fat studies to tackle these linkages with white supremacy and to de-norm the pervasiveness of whiteness throughout.

Both Hetrick and Attig (FSR) and Senyonga (TF) focus on the ways in which academia perpetuates fatphobia in both its physical and ideological organization. However, the ways that these discussions are had are extremely different. Hetrick and Attig (FSR) begin with a focus on desks in classrooms and challenge the idea that they are simply neutral objects in academia:

These desks are not, we argue, neutral and benign spaces; they are, rather, **highly active material and discursive constructions** that seek to both indoctrinate students' bodies and minds into **the middle-class values of restraint and discipline**, and inscribe these messages onto the bodies that sit in them. Classroom desks are one way that “**discourses [are] deployed in order to contain fat bodies**, fat people . . . [and] simultaneously construct and erase the fat body, attempting to expel it from representation at the very moment that defines it” (Brazier & LeBesco, 2001, p. 1). (p. 197)

Hetrick and Attig make extremely important points here around desks as a discursive site, and the ways they are used to both physically and ideologically regulate fat bodies. Where they miss the mark,

however, is naming the “values of restraint and discipline” as inherent to “the middle class”. However, referring back to an excerpt from Senyonga’s work, it is undeniable that these values are linked to whiteness. She writes that “the binary of **white subjects as disciplined and civilized** and **Black people as uninhibited and primal** was bolstered by racial science that purported that Black people acted upon base desires (Strings, 2015).” (TF, p. 224). Discipline, control, and restraint are all tied to assumptions of white supremacy that assert white bodies are civilized, moral, and logical, whereas Black, Indigenous, and Racialized bodies are constructed as in need of civilization and assimilation into white modes of knowing, doing, and being. Senyonga (TF) touches on this racial dichotomy, starting parallel to Hetrick and Attig (FSR), but diverging with the invocation of race:

I experienced how the world around me was structured to exclude my presence, whether through the **small classroom chair and desk size** (or the dreaded seat attached to desks) or the **school uniforms** that were never in my size. **I confronted others’ conceptions of my in/capacities to excel where racialized projections about my supposed intellectual inferiority compounded fatphobic assumptions of laziness.** (p. 220)

Senyonga extends that which both her and Hetrick and Attig (FSR) are discussing, by speaking about her experience with fatness in academia as a fat, Black femme. That Hetrick and Attig (FSR) do not mention race, again, reminds me of Lind’s (TF) rightful assertion that for white people, fatphobia is race-neutral, but for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people, fatphobia is inextricably tied to racism. Notably, Hetrick and Attig (FSR) do mention whiteness, and are one of the only chapters in the book to do so. However, their engagement comes at the end of the chapter after they have already established that it is middle-class values at play in this situation, to which whiteness is only additive. I agree with Senyonga (TF), though, that whiteness is more ingrained in fatphobia than this simple accession. Thinking about myself as a fat, white social work student: my intellectual abilities as related to my race have never been questioned. I have had to deal with fatphobic assumptions around laziness and lack of control, but for argument’s sake, if I were to become thin tomorrow, I would no longer face questioning. As a white person, I am assumed to be capable of understanding, able to learn by myself, and to present logical arguments even when hinged on my personal experience. All of this is to say, it is not enough for fat studies to mention whiteness only in chapters that centre race in their analysis or as only a piece of

information added almost as an afterthought: the only way to challenge whiteness is to engage with it in repeated and critical ways throughout.

Impacts of whiteness in fat studies: An actual and symbolic 'whiteout', though with glimmers of hope

Whiteness has become invisible in the field of fat studies through the lack of inclusion of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people's voices, experiences, and bodies as activists and scholars, contributors, and even participants in research endeavours. Lind (TF) reminds us that "the scholarship that considers experiences of fatphobia has, until recently, **not mentioned white supremacy or whiteness at all**" (p. 190). What this results in is both an actual and symbolic 'whiteout', in which there are several brief flashes where one navigating through the flurry of fat studies may see a flash of something 'non-white' here, where race is mentioned but not engaged with, or there, where whiteness is articulated but not integrated in meaningful ways, but finds themselves stuck in the storm. As never-ending as it may seem, however, the storm has begun to weather with critical work being done that does engage with the critical linkages between whiteness and fatphobia and moves away from empty mentions, discursive (white) power-plays, and posturing; that questions the origin stories of the field with recognition of the Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people's critical contributions to the field; that challenges the manifestations of whiteness through things like objectivity, neutrality, and professionalization; and that promotes the stewardship of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat experiences, voices, and bodies to them in authentic ways.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

It is clear that whiteness has become invisible within the field of fat studies through mechanisms of intellectual colonization that establish white fat activists, scholars, and participants as the norm; empty mentions along with discursive power-plays that allow for the appearance of critical engagement without actually having to do so; and promoting discourses of objectivity and neutrality to preclude engagement with subject positionality. Though there was always work being done to engage with fatness and its relation to white supremacy, especially by Black, Indigenous, and Racialized activist-scholars, and recent work published in the field attempts to foreground challenges to whiteness and bring attention to these counter-discursive histories, “fat spaces - both in and out of the academy - remain almost exclusively white” (Friedman, 2019, p. 244). The resulting ‘whiteout’, in which whiteness continues to function and into which Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people’s voices, experiences, and contributions are absorbed, often promotes an ahistorical, decontextualized, and depoliticized form of fatness that reproduces an ostensibly fat white normativity that does not take into account the ways in which fatness itself, as well as at its intersections, demands theorizing that attends to white colonial histories, as they *are* the origins of fatphobia and map in different ways onto bodies that are ‘non-white’. The following discussions will capture some of the key themes in my findings, including the linkages between fatphobia and white supremacy, the effects of essentialism and race erasure, the existence of discourses of white civility, and connections to wider trends in academia and other real-life implications.

Fatphobia and White Supremacy: An Undeniable and Necessary Link

Some of my analysis in the findings section of this paper has already captured some of the ways in which fatphobia and white supremacy are linked, such as Senyonga’s (2019) important historicizing of the links between anti-Blackness, Black woman/femhood, and fatphobia. Meera’s (2019) work also speaks to this as she discusses links between white supremacy and medical discourses, the latter of which is used to justify surveillance and attacks on Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat bodies in particular. Although some of this has been covered, I feel it is important to reiterate this point to the degree that it

cannot be ignored. Even as I was conducting the literature review for this MRP, it is clear that my articulation of discursive constructions of fatness does not engage with these links in meaningful ways. I have chosen to keep my initial literature review, however, as I think it speaks to the ways in which race and whiteness are obscured in research on fatness and is, itself, an example of erasure and essentialism.

Fatphobia's conception is inherently rooted in white supremacy and the demarcation of the racial Other. Forth (2012) notes that fatness became part of the many markers of the uncivilized (raced) Other, who lacked self-control and discipline²¹. From the white gaze, fatness added to the list of "moral defects" that racial Others were marked by, as it alluded to a moral "looseness" (Forth, 2012, p. 215) that justified their consequent colonization and assimilation into the white morals of discipline, control, and regulation. This inherently raced view of fatness can be seen in the anti-Black stereotypes of the 'Mammy' and 'Hottentot Venus', which, through different pathways, "serve to cast Black fat femme bodies in monstrous contrast to white femininity" (Senyonga, 2019, p. 225), that then justify their regulation and in some cases, elimination. Depictions of Turtle Island, or colonial North America, around the time of colonization also operationalized fatness to justify colonial control of Indigenous Peoples, especially women. Robinson (2019) notes that colonial North America was often represented as a naked, fat, savage/violent, and overly-sexual woman marked as Indigenous through large feathered headdresses. These images present "a sexualized and fertile fat female body demanding to be conquered" (Robinson, 2019, p. 18): the equivocation of Indigenous land with Indigenous women through visual markers then also marks Indigenous women in need of colonization and civilization. Stereotypes of Indigenous women as sexually and spatially excessive mark them with the same moral looseness that requires colonization as listed above, and like anti-Black fatphobia, is rooted in colonial white supremacy. The disappearing of these and other undeniable linkages between fatness and white supremacy, I argue, is consistent with

²¹ I would argue that there are also discourses of psycho-colonialism functioning here, through which difference is pathologized, problematized, and deficit-focused. Bodies that are different, then, become marked for a 'cure' to their difference. Psycho-colonialism was articulated by Penson (2019) in regards to madness, which I think fits here, especially with psychiatry's history of oppressive diagnoses like drapetomania, residential school syndrome, nymphomania, and hysteria.

intellectual colonization as I have articulated it here. By erasing Black, Indigenous, and Racialized voices, experiences, and people themselves from fat studies literature (unless viewed through the white gaze), these histories do not have to be accounted for in discussions of fatphobia. Love (2018) writes that when these histories are not acknowledged (which they tend not to be in spaces that are mostly white), “the fact that everything we know about our bodies are white-centred” (para. 20) remains ignored and leaves discussions of fatphobia in the oversimplified discourse of ‘thin supremacy’ without attention to where it originates in the first place. Another aspect of intellectual colonization functioning includes the erasure of the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat activists and scholars to the field of fat studies, as well as the overall push for fat liberation. In addition to the discussion in the findings section, the body positivity movement, though originating with Black women and femmes, has become highly white-washed and commercialized (Sydney, 2020, tweet 2 and 3 of 5; Greene, 2019). Greene (2019) writes that body positivity has been severed from its initial purpose of making space for marginalized bodies to experience “acceptance and self-love” through “forces of white supremacy, anti-blackness, and fatphobia” (para. 6). Indeed, many of the ‘bo-po’ movement’s public faces are white (or at least white-passing), cisgender women who have hourglass shapes with few visible rolls, body bulges, or cellulite. Bo-po no longer challenges that which it was intended to, because its origins with fat Black women and femmes have been obscured while the message has been white-washed and commodified. This appropriation erases Black contributions to fat activism, and only further reifies the dominant origin story of the resultant field of fat studies.

Fat studies, by divesting from critical and nuanced discussions of white supremacist origins of fatphobia and investing rather in empty mentions, has simply become another pathway to intellectual colonization. The impact of this reality on Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people is real and harmful: it negates their nuanced experiences of fatphobia in ways that only further magnify its violence. Daufin (2019) speaks to the unique anti-Black fatphobia Black women and girls face in multiple spheres of their life, including in interpersonal relationships, education, research, and the criminal justice system. Harrison (2020) points to the ways that anti-Black fatphobia intersects with gendered assumptions about

disordered eating prevent Black boys from receiving support. Sydsky (2020) calls to action the need to address the anti-Black fatphobia in our society: “Okay fat black women taught you how to love your body so now what? Where do we go from here? We taught you how to love your bodies while our bodies are still enduring violence on the daily” (Tweet 5 of 5). Fat studies and mainstream fat activism as they stand now are not prepared to address these and other intersectional forms of fatphobia. I also argue, however, that they should not do so until they reckon with the rampant whiteness within, or risk perpetuating additional harm.

Essentialism, Race Erasure, and its Impacts: Fat Liberation for All?

The epistemic erasure of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people from fat activism and scholarship results in essentialist representations of a fat (white, yet raceless) normativity that do not account for how fatphobia and whiteness are intertwined. Chilisa (2012) ties essentialism to the ways in which research from the white or colonial gaze functions to not only mark Black, Indigenous, and Racialized bodies as Others, but also blurs complexities and nuances within groups of people. In this way, the category of the racial Other functions to deepen and broaden the divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Though Chilisa (2012) speaks about the ‘first-world’ view of the ‘third world’, I think it also applies to the way ‘non-white’ fat bodies and experiences are viewed through the white colonial gaze: by obscuring the nuances of how fatness maps in different ways onto white, Black, Indigenous, and Racialized bodies (and rather positioning it within the binary of ‘white’ and ‘non-white’), the white colonial gaze is allowed to refer to all ‘non-white’ bodies under the oversimplified identifiers of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ that erase the nuances within. The resulting view places that Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people’s experiences of fatphobia can be conceptualized simply as (white) fatphobia plus race as a homogenous group.

The general lack of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized representation as scholars in fat studies is rooted in multiple dynamics of whiteness: differential access to (post-secondary) education and community resources, discriminatory publishing and review practices, and the non-inclusive and epistemically violent nature of fat studies and mainstream fat activism, just to name a few. This

representational deficiency matters, because as Hunter (2002) reminds us, all research originates from a particular epistemological position with specific values that make salient some topics while devaluing others. It is clear that, by and large, the whiteness of fat activists and scholars (in both quality and quantity) carries an epistemic deficiency in both linking white supremacy and fatphobia, as well as making salient issues of race and whiteness in meaningful ways. However, representational justice will *not* be achieved by quantifying representational justice through things like diversity quotas or inclusion percentages at academic institutions, as they result in Black, Indigenous, and Racialized bodies being tokenized and having their expertise questioned if labelled a ‘diversity hire’, among other harms (Joseph, Janes, Badwall, Almeida, 2019). Furthermore, I agree with Joseph and colleagues (2019), who write that “politics of representation [through quotas and percentages] have more to do with regulating difference, (while creating the perception of equity), as opposed to dismantling white supremacy and directly addressing systemic racism in institution” (p. 175). Addressing the lack of representation of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized scholars in the field of fat studies cannot and *will not* be solved by simple measures of diversity or inclusion. Even if there were some whimsical ‘representational justice coefficient’, it would mean nothing (and would arguably do more harm) without a critical reckoning of the whiteness imbued in fat studies literature to date.

Daufin (2019) posits that fat studies must commit to “more truly intersectional research” (p. 168), that challenges essentialism by making transparent author positionality as well as clarifying issues of representation, such as who participants in a research study are, or who pieces of research are aimed at representing. What this call seems like to me, is a shift in fat studies to an ethic of care and/or reciprocity to move away from the white extractive nature of the field and towards one that integrates greater conversation between scholars, activists, and fat people. By assuming an ethic of care and/or reciprocity, representation of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people as scholars and participants, is not a number that can be quantified, but rather has to do with honouring lived experience and expertise in ways that inherently challenge whiteness and serve enrich the field even further. Without doing this, fat studies will not reach its stated goal of fat liberation for all.

White Civility, Innocence, and Fatness: Theorizing Empty Mentions and Discursive Power-plays

Another key theme throughout the analyzed texts included the ways in which fatness, and resistance to fatphobia, must, by nature, be outside the normative box. However, when attempting to start discussion around the ways in which, for example, fat studies as a field is inherently white, or the linkages between fatphobia and white supremacy, there is often silence. Lind (2019) categorizes these silences, along with avoiding talk about whiteness and not thinking critically about it, as “common iterations of white sociality”, all of which perpetuate whiteness while appearing “innocent” or “polite” (p. 184). Coleman (2006) asserts that “race is not just bodies, but also conduct” (p. 12), which intimately links ideas about civility in conduct to whiteness. White civility allows for the perpetuation of a narrative of peacefulness, politeness, and good-naturedness that ultimately facilitates the demarcation of the Other as explicitly unable to hold these same civilized morals (Coleman, 2008). This binary can be seen clearly in the previous section, where particularly Black and Indigenous fatness was used to convey messages about their moral and civil characters in ways that explicitly set them apart from white people and mark them as in need of civilizing into ‘appropriate’ (white) morals. Fatphobia in general does pull on discourses of civility and morality by asserting that fatness is emblematic of a lack of self-control, self-discipline, misplaced (or non-existent) morality. However, the problematization of these ‘civil and moral deficiencies’ can only establish itself so deeply and intensely by linking them to the inferior racial Other. When this explicitly raced connection is not made, however, white supremacy’s role is obfuscated and discussions of fatphobia are highly oversimplified (and misdirected). In effect, and as made clear by the second reader of this MRP, fatphobia may not really be about fatness at all, but rather functions as another avenue that sanctions the marginalization, surveillance, and destruction of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people through white supremacist violence rooted in veiled and universal discussions of “health” and “science”. The lack of a critical race-based understanding of fatphobia’s origins and functioning promotes the fear of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people and bodies inherent in white supremacy through things like the “obesity epidemic”, “threats to the nation’s productivity”, and the “social costs of obesity”. Without critically implicating white supremacy in discussions of fatphobia, fat

studies perpetuates and supports white supremacy while continuing to leave whiteness unnamed and unexamined.

It is not only through fatphobia that discourses of white civility find their way into discussions of fatness, but also through various forms of fat activism. Mainstream fat activist spaces, aside from being mostly white, also tend to further subvert and, in a sense, reclaim that which functions to oppress them (Lind, 2019). In this case, fat activism attempts to further embody the ‘incivility’ of fat bodies by presenting them loud and proud, so to speak, in ways that reject the fatphobic imperative to diminish fat bodies in size, visibility, and audibility. Fat activism and scholarship have largely been connected to queer activism and scholarship, with the former taking up many strategies of resistance used by the latter. One of such is the use of camp, in which people take the negative messages being ascribed to them and reconceptualize them in a way that promotes their personhood (Wolf, 2013)²². But when these ‘campy’ practices are used to challenge fatphobia by subverting civility *without* an analysis of white supremacy, whiteness remains unexamined and is then deployed to further erase white supremacy’s presence. One such example is through the use of clearly raced language to evoke their underlying message in white and essentialized ways: Lind (2019) notes the example of The Chubsters, which utilized gang languaging and imagery to promote fat liberation and challenge fatphobia through things like humorous performances. However, by drawing on gang symbolism without discussing whiteness (though unquestionably raced, particularly rooted in anti-Blackness), this group was able to extract the underlying messaging of gangs without attention to race at all. In this way, these actions align with practices of camp, but also undeniably allow whiteness to remain unquestioned and unaddressed. This, I think, aligns well with the ways in which discursive power-plays are used in fat studies literature: by using raced language (‘policing’, ‘vicious, common, and unlearned’, ‘welts and marks where discipline has been practiced on our bodies’), as well as eliminating race from the discussion (making blanket statements, as well as ignoring implications for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people), whiteness remains unquestioned. By

²² Refer to Lind (2019) for another definition and various examples of camp in fat activism.

responding to fatphobia with racially-tied subversions of white civility, fat activism and scholarship that derives from it reinforce whiteness and only further marginalize Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people in these spaces.

Related to discussions around white civility, are discussions of exalted subjectivity and the ways that white people are allowed to escape accountability and self-implication. Pon, Gosine, and Phillips (2011) note that in settler colonial states, such as Canada and the U.S.A., Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people are constructed as ‘deviant’ through various pathways that pull from and reinforce racist assumptions (though the demarcation is often said to be divorced from notions about race and based in ‘objective facts’). Those marked as deviant, who are mostly Black, Indigenous, and Racialized are then positioned as a threat to the nation’s safety and development (Pon et al., 2011): examples include ‘welfare mothers’ who are typically (though incorrectly) constructed as Black, ‘immigrants who are taking our jobs and putting strain on the system’, risks to (white) women around racist assumptions of predatory nature (often targeted are Black men), and so on. As Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people are positioned through the lens of deviance, then, white people are constructed as enterprising, productive members of society who are inherently “responsible citizens, compassionate, caring, and committed to the values of diversity and multiculturalism” (Thobani, 2007, p. 4). Within this exalted subjectivity, white people are always given benefit of the doubt and are allowed to, as Fellows and Razack (1998) deem it, “race to innocence” when called out because “that wasn’t my intention”, or “you’re being so sensitive, I didn’t mean it like that”. Often when Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people are telling white people the ways that unexamined whiteness or racist behaviour is harmful, it is met with defensiveness, exaggerated guilt, or emotionality. This, along with the persistent benefit of the doubt, allows for the privileging of white comfort at the expense of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people, whose comfort “has always been that which must be either authorized, endured, while also available to be compromised, consumed and appropriated” for the benefit of white people” (Joseph et al., 2019, p. 181). Joseph and colleagues (2019) tie this to the use of ‘diversity, inclusion, and equity’ measures that allow for perpetuation of the narrative that white people are ‘doing the work’ and ‘progressive’, but often are not

accompanied by thorough accountings of whiteness at work or significant changes to better meet the needs of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people. This all connects in important ways, I think, to the ways in which empty mentions are operationalized in fat studies literature. When mentions of race and whiteness in fat studies literature are not accompanied by critical engagement, white/white-passing fat scholars are able to appear progressive. Through exalted subjectivity, they are allowed to maintain that their work is well-intentioned and absolve themselves of accountability. This results in the maintenance of white comfort, again, at the expense of the comfort and safety of Black, Indigenous, Racialized people in the field of fat studies. However, when fat studies literature goes beyond empty mentions and discursive power-plays to intentionally reckon with the existence of whiteness and white supremacy in the field (and the very issue they discuss), there are possibilities to destabilize white civility, innocence, and comfort. In *Thickening Fat* (Rinaldi et al., 2019), there are assertions throughout that the field has not reckoned with whiteness in meaningful ways, that some of the scholars themselves have participated in the disappearing of whiteness. Rather than presenting the field through rose-coloured glasses so to speak, it is critical for fat studies scholars going forward to reckon with this reality and identify how it will be challenged in their work. Perhaps to aid commitments to transparency, articles should be labelled more clearly around what scholars take up in their article, as well as to place an importance on discussions white supremacy. When whiteness remains unnamed, it is allowed to remain unexamined and thereby remains the norm. By explicitly labelling fat studies research that deals with whiteness and white supremacy as such (for example, “whiteness and fatphobia”, or “white supremacy and fatphobia”), they are not only named, but are also presented as undeniably linked and made more difficult to ignore or evade through empty mentions and discursive powerplays.

Representation, Epistemic Injustice, and Oppression: Connections to Academia and Society as a Whole

Though I have attempted to take up issues of whiteness in fat studies literature, I also think it is important to connect these discussions to realities in academia, as well as wider society. Whiteness is not

just an issue in fat studies – it permeates institutional arrangements at virtually every level. I will discuss academic institutions (including scholarship, instructing, and research), then extend further to close off.

Baffoe, Asimeng-Boahene, and Ogbuagu (2014) note that whiteness pervades throughout both academia and research, and, in line with what has been discussed here about the field of fat studies, that it becomes the normative yet unexamined standard to which Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people are held up to, othered, and marginalized. Research is particularly implicated in this, as much of the research done within colonial contexts devalues knowledge that falls outside of what is ‘acceptable’, largely made up of systematic and empirical sources (Chilisa, 2012). Goitom (2019) writes that personal narratives and taking up new lines of inquiry (that are often neglected by the colonial gaze of research) seen as “lacking ‘legitimacy’”, and that for work to be “‘publishable’”, it must “‘include works by scholars whom they suggest to be ‘credible’ originators of knowledge” (p. 198). In addition, Chilisa (2012) writes that what is considered ‘ethical’ in research is rooted in colonial understandings of the world that themselves are often unethical. For example, generalizability is something taken up, even in qualitative research that is not focused on such, but is an ethical issue: it views a group of people (regardless of how big or small the population is) and defines them through colonial terms and concepts that ignores both lived experiences and nuances within populations (Chilisa, 2012). The coloniality and whiteness of current accepted research paradigms is pervasive, and often puts the onus on Black, Indigenous, and Racialized researchers to assemble their own ethical methodologies that are specific to the culture or group of people they are working with (Oba, 2018)²³. When Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people do gain access into academic spaces, they face constant and rigorous scrutiny that is held over them throughout their time in the academy (Joseph et al., 2019). This is only magnified when Black, Indigenous, and Racialized scholars are also fat, as assumptions about racial intelligence and fat morality intersect (Love, 2018)²⁴. Fat

²³ Oba (2018) found that the current accepted research paradigms were not useful in research with Black African youth - they did not attend to Afrocentric values in various ways, such as a scholarly distance between researchers and participants. As such, Oba (2018) articulated her own Afrocentric methodology that was later termed Youth and Elders in Solidarity (or YES).

²⁴ The same magnification, though through different pathways, occurs along other intersectional lines as well, such as sanism, transphobia, and ableism, to name a few.

studies is not the place in academia where whiteness seems to reside and fester, but rather, as evidenced by the work referenced here, it lives in hiring committees, peer reviewing, research ethics boards, what is taught in class and how, and so on. Whiteness, white supremacy, and colonialism continue to be implicit in the very structure of academia, and until there is a nuanced reckoning with this reality in which white academics reject notions of innocence and comfort, it will continue to manifest in research and scholarship, curriculum, and faculty representation.

I could write an additional MRP on the ways that fatphobia affects fat people's lives in material and concrete ways, ways that take on different nuances depending on intersectionalities like race, madness, (dis)ability, trans- and homophobia, socio-economic class, and so on. Fatphobia is found in healthcare, education, the media, interpersonal relationships, the legal and criminal justice systems, and more - all of which are magnified in different ways when an individual is Black, Indigenous, or Racialized and holds multiple other marginalized identities. However, challenging fatphobia through addressing individual's fat aversive beliefs, or changing curriculum, or all of the other band aid solutions that may be proposed to address where fatphobia lives, are not enough. White supremacy and colonialism as the root of fatphobia, along with racism and other oppressive regimes, *must* be addressed toward substantive change. Sonya Renee Taylor said it best: "You will never dismantle white supremacy and still hold on to transphobia, not possible. You won't dismantle white supremacy and hold on to fatphobia or ableism or ageism or homophobia, ***they all must go***" (2020, 5:16-5:37).

Implications for Social Work Education, Research, and Practice

Fat studies is a field that social work should, or rather, *must* be engaged in. Many of the fat studies scholars I have cited in this MRP work and write in the field of social work. I agree with Friedman (2012) that fat *is* a social work issue, but think that is even more true in light of the findings of this paper: fatphobia is not singular or static, but rather shifts with the multiple identities one holds as well as with context. Social work education, research, and practice all need to engage with "structural nature of fat oppression" (Friedman, 2012, p. 54), which includes a critical lens on whiteness and white supremacy.

Paralleling the field of fat studies as well as its activist and practice siblings, the role of whiteness in social work too has often been obscured, ignored, or oversimplified. As a field, social work has been (and continues to be) complicit in processes of racialization (and subsequent disciplinary practice) as well as the maintenance of white supremacist values (Lee & Ferrer, 2014). This role can be seen in education, research, and practice (Almeida, Werkmeister Rozas, Cross-Denny, Lee, & Yamada, 2019; Chilisa, 2012; Lee & Bhuyan, 2013). Fat studies, social work, and academia as a whole must address the ways that whiteness manifests in their respective literature, practice, and education. Without this, the emancipatory and liberatory message that academia, social work, and fat studies all profess cannot be achieved.

Social work also engages with fat people and their experiences in many concrete ways, but has yet to largely integrate a critical awareness of fatphobia into research, education, and practice. Indeed, even in my (relatively short) time as a post-secondary student as well as in the field, I have only really had discussions about fatphobia in one placement setting and two university courses (and even then it was quite minimal). However, critical discussions of fatness *must* be integrated into social work, as fatphobia plays into the decisions that we must make on the frontlines, in our work, and in our classrooms. For example, Friedman (2012) highlights the way in which fatphobia becomes a risk factor for child welfare workers, who are then able to weaponize a child's weight/size as a reason for child apprehension. Mik-Meyer (2010) illustrates the ways that social workers are involved in weight loss interventions through "personal health conversations" (p. 391) that view the body through a biomedical lens and further internalized fatphobia. Senyonga (2019) speaks to the ways that fatphobia affects how fat social work students and professors walk within the walls of academia, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, or Racialized. I think about the ways that fatphobia is used to justify disciplining of community members and service users as 'hostile', 'not group ready', or 'uncooperative'. However, there is also evidence of social work's contributions to challenging fatphobia in policy and practice (Thornton, 2017). Nevertheless, discussions of fatphobia must be integrated into social work in ways that "see fat bodies as worthy of serious study" (Friedman, 2012, p. 56), but also consider which bodies are repeatedly being eliminated from these conversations. Integrating challenges to fatphobia into the field of social work will

not be enough if they are not accompanied by a critical race/whiteness approach, otherwise, they will continue to render whiteness invisible and perpetuate the same epistemic harms.

In a broader sense, I also think that there must be a fundamental shift in social work around how we not only conceptualize our own bodies, but also how we are asked to conceptualize other people's bodies in our personal and professional lives. Our bodies, appearances, and experiences all are mapped by various privileges and oppressions that cannot be extracted from each other or viewed as static or isolated. Bodies are not neutral – the various identities we hold shift how we must walk in the world and how we are taken up by others. Integrating critical approaches to fatness into social work's reckoning with embodiment is a necessary step forward towards challenging oppression for all.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

That whiteness pervades fat studies literature is an undeniable fact. Its functioning becomes invisible through the disappearing of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people's voices, experiences, and contributions to fat activism and scholarship (unless colonized by the white gaze); rendered non-existent through persistent empty or non-existent mentions of racism, colonialism, and white supremacy, as well as discursive power-plays that make essentializing statements about fat bodies (often using racially-coded language to do so) that allow for the appearance of progressiveness; and subsumed under discourses around professionalism, objectivity, rigour that allow for the marking of the racial Other without 'race-ing' the white bodies doing the marking. What this results in, then, is the reproduction of the essential fat body as inherently white that further erases the nuances that fatphobia takes on for people who are Black, Indigenous, and Racialized. I think it is also important to reiterate here that I am not the first person to draw attention to this unexamined whiteness: Black, Indigenous, and Racialized activist-scholars have done so as they speak to fatphobia and its intersections with racism, colonialism, xenophobia, and so on. I also think of the long histories of activism by Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people in various spheres to assert their rights and make their voices heard. Their calls to action, as well as the theorizing emerging from resistance, are an undeniable influence on fat studies and academia as a whole. As a result, there have been spaces that have brought attention to whiteness in fat studies, as well as made linkages between white supremacy and fatphobia. However, these works are still in the minority of fat studies literature.

Though, for a majority of my analysis, I have positioned *The Fat Studies Reader* and *Thickening Fat* in binary opposition to one another (as dominantly discursive and counter-discursive respectively), I do not think the answer is that simple. I am not saying here, that *The Fat Studies Reader* should be thrown out entirely (it should not), nor that *Thickening Fat* should be held as the perfect fat studies text (it is not). To do so would actually perpetuate whiteness through a focus on perfectionism and either/or thinking (Jones & Okun, 2001). Rather, what I am saying is that any reading of fat studies literature, as well as any engagement in fat activism, *must* take up race from the beginning. Particularly for white people like

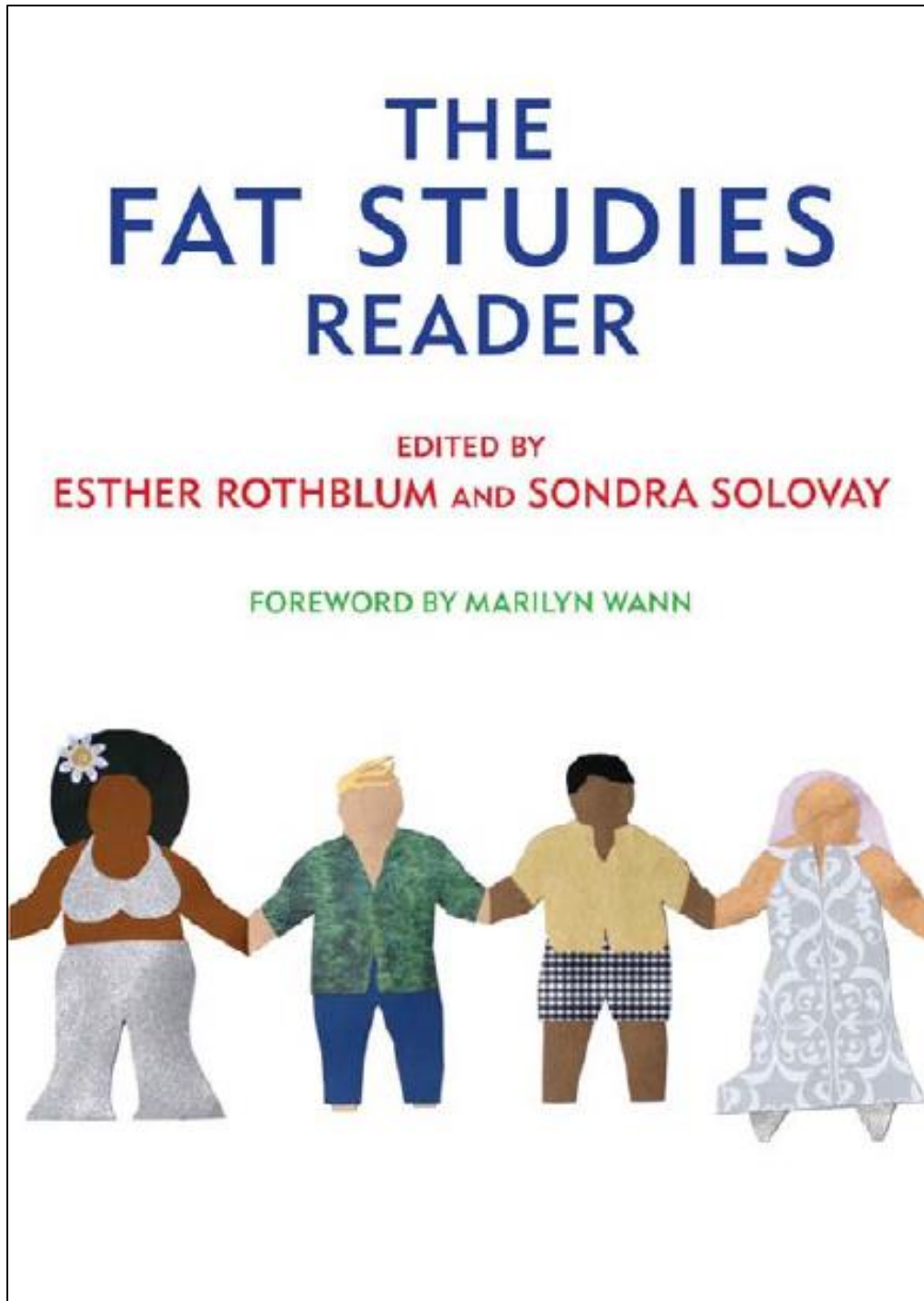
myself, a critical understanding of our own positionality as white people as well as the continuing legacy of fatphobic white supremacy is necessary for reading, writing, and acting.

As I think about what fat studies might look like that both challenges its whiteness and incorporates a critical-race based approach (my third stated research question, of many and counting as of this point in my writing), I am weary of invoking a single approach. First, I do not think I have merit to do so, as I have only engaged with fat studies and activism in the last few years, and the whiteness present in both of these things over the past eight months as I have written this MRP. Though intersectionality shows promise in connecting white supremacy and fatphobia to other oppressive projects, there is a tendency for it to be co-opted in a way that mirrors discourses of ‘diversity’, ‘inclusion’, and ‘equity’ (Rice, Harrison, & Friedman, 2019). That is, that intersectionality can merely become a tool of whiteness that obfuscates the possibility of real change over the perception of progressiveness. I am also weary of the use of Black women as the axis upon which intersectionality rests, in that they are positioned as the quintessential intersectional case (Nash, 2008). In this way, Black women are marked as the Other, even when critical reckonings are beginning to take place²⁵. I feel even in this paper, where I have attempted to take a strict anti-essentialist stance, that I may have done just that. Because of all of this, I do not think that intersectionality is enough (or at least, not on its own) to address and challenge whiteness in fat studies. I feel that fat studies *must* take a critical race-based approach that takes race and whiteness as an ‘entry-point to analysis’, especially because of the ways that whiteness and white supremacy map onto virtually all oppressions. Until the field does so, it will remain a mostly white space that is, at best uncomfortable for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized fat people, and at worst, complicit in the maintenance of fatphobic white supremacy. Fat liberation will not, and *should not*, be achievable if it does not reckon in complex and critical ways with whiteness and white supremacy.

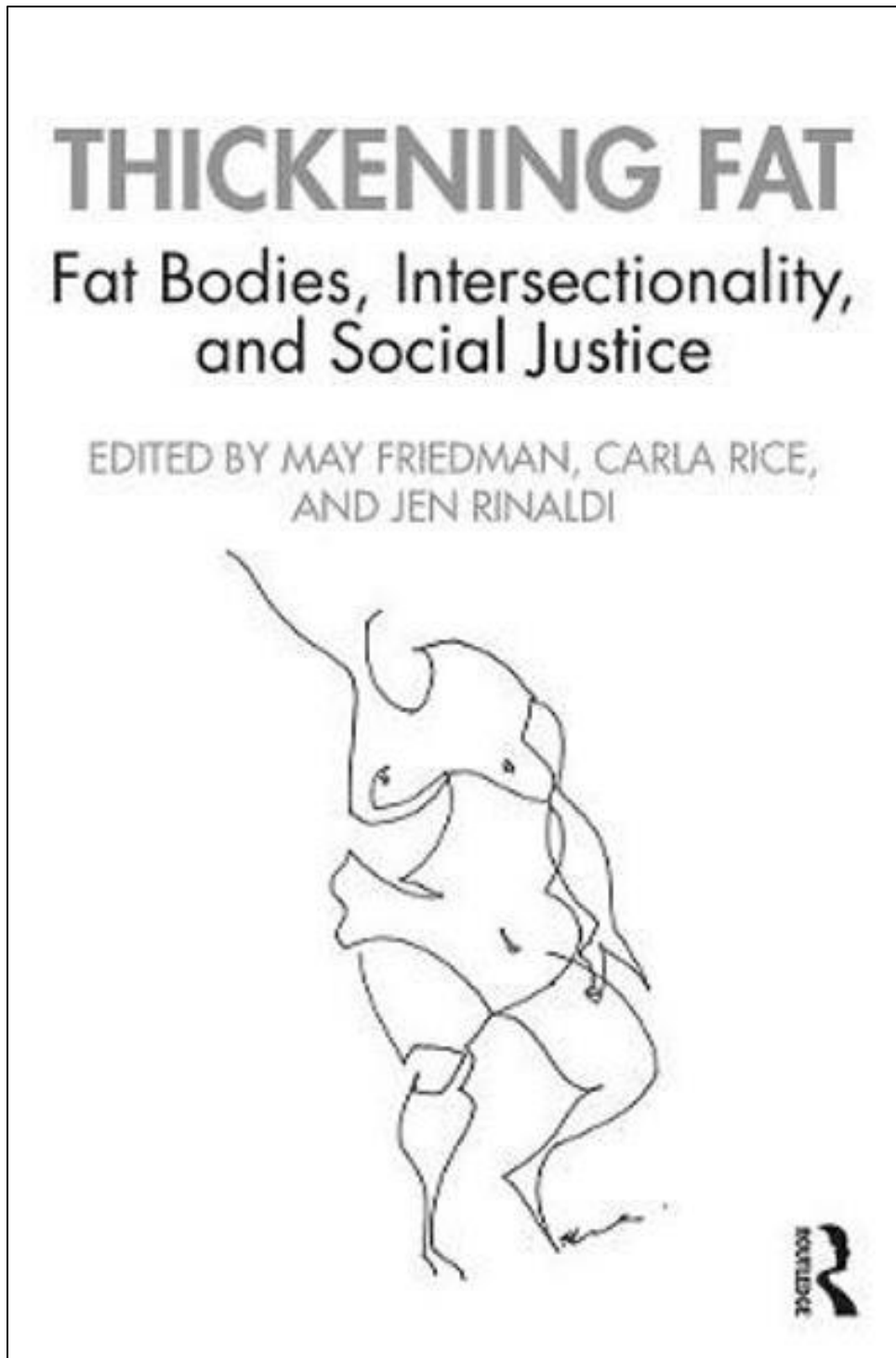
²⁵ Anti-Black racism, misogynoir, and fatphobia are themselves heterogeneous depending on things like geo-location, gender expression and identity, colourism, and so on. In addition, though there may be parallels with, for example, the mechanisms that allow anti-Indigenous racism, misogyny, and fatphobia to exist, positioning Black women as an intersectional fulcrum will only result in further essentialism and the deepening of Black women as the fundamental opposite to white femininity.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Cover Image of *The Fat Studies Reader*



Appendix B – Cover Image of Thickening Fat



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